

決戦前夜

精霊使いの剣舞

ブレイドダンス

志瑞祐

Illustration

桜はんぺん



「おはようございませう、お兄様」
ぺこっと礼儀正しくお辞儀するミレーユ。

「おはよう、カニート」

Mirille Laurenfrost
ミレーユ・ローレンフロスト

Milla Bassett
ミラ・バセット

そのかたわらにはもう一人、
可憐な少女の姿があった。
フリル付きのメイド服を着た
〈破烈の師団〉の師団長、ミラ・バセットだ。

「カミトの故郷の巫女装束、
気に入っていただけましたか？」
エストは小首を傾げると、
ベッドの上で長い袖をヒラヒラさせた。
その拍子に肩口がはだけ、
華奢な鎖骨がチラッと覗く。

Est
エスト



「あ、あの、何か
おかしいでしょうか？」

恥じらうように、
もじもじと太ももを擦り合わせる
レオノーラ。

「いいや、なんつーか、
その……綺麗だ」

Leonora Lancaster
レオノーラ・ランカスター

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Prologue

With dense fog, «Astral Zero»'s thicket.

(—It really makes you nervous. Assaulting a stronghold, that is.)

Kamito silenced his breathing as he advanced through the tree branches.

His Elemental Waffe «Terminus Est» was also in a concealed state with her presence perfectly hidden. Solo stealth conduct was Kamito's specialty.

"Kami.....can.....hear me?"

The small spirit crystal fragment in his hand lit up weakly and out came Claire's muffled voice.

Utilizing the spirit resonance phenomenon, it was a spirit crystal for communication. It's effective range wasn't very large, but it was much more difficult to detect when compared to using spirits.

"The reception is bad. Your voice is fragmented."

"I see.....it's because the «Barrier».....been strengthened....."

Then suddenly.....with a sound that pained the ears, the spirit crystal's light faded.

"So the signal won't reach from here on, huh....."

While sighing, Kamito placed the now-useless spirit crystal in his pocket.

Though saying that, using it in the enemy's «Stronghold» wouldn't be a good idea.

(At the signal, take out the enemy team's commander in one go—)

Kamito licked his lips and readied his hand on «Terminus Est»'s hilt.

The «Blade Dance»'s real battle — the last day. The ones «Team Scarlet» had chosen as their target were representatives from the same Areishia Academy, «Team Cernunnos».

Taking into consideration the number of «Magic Stones» they needed to advance and the enemy's battle strength, Claire had proposed attacking a stronghold.

Attacking the heavily reinforced «Stronghold» would be very disadvantaged for the invaders. But in order to reach the finals, they had no other option but to follow through with it.

Just then, a showy explosion occurred far away.

He wondered if Claire and the others had entered into a battle with the enemy's main force.

Taking that as the signal, Kamito came out of hiding.

(—A long battle in enemy territory will be bad for us. We need to settle this in one push.)

Blitz.

While Claire, Ellis and Fianna acted as bait, the attacker, Kamito, would crush the stronghold's center — that was Kamito and the others' chosen tactic this time.

They had fought «Team Cernunnos» before during the academy ranking battles. Back when the team consisted of only two people, Claire and him, they had been severely beaten by the druid captain's «Beast Swarm Spirit».

But such strong ritual magic required a lot of time. If they defeated them before it gets completed, it would be their victory.

(That ritual magic should be gathering the «Earth's Pulse» in the center of the stronghold.)

In other words, if he crushed the center with lightning speed—

(—That will decide the battle!)

Avoiding detection by the guardian spirits patrolling for invaders and bypassing restriction or other fatal traps, Kamito advanced in a straight line.

Countless dull thorns flew from all directions but each was shot down by ice arrows.

It was the covering fire of Rinslet who was concealing herself far away. She had been a sharpshooter to begin with, but participating in the «Blade Dance»'s real battle had truly leveled those skills up to a sniper.

She was a partner Kamito could trust his back to.

"Ohhhhhhhh!"

Avoiding the three «Driads» protecting the barrier—

Tens of seconds after the signal, Kamito reached the center of the stronghold.

".....!"

The sight just up ahead.

A watchtower-like shrine stood there surrounded by giant sacred trees.

Upon the altar, a noble girl wrapped with white rope was in the middle of a ritual.

She had shining golden hair and glassy ice blue eyes.

The girl who lived in the spirit forest and had been taught the secret techniques of the first spirit contractor.

"Jeez, I knew you'd come, you ruffians!"

The girl temporarily interrupted the ritual and glared down at Kamito.

(.....Knew?)

Kamito furrowed his brows.

(Don't tell me they read my approach?)

But the «Beast Swarm Spirit» summoning ritual was not yet complete.

The protection spirit contractors were also engaged in battle with Claire and the others. It was already too late for them to return even if they realized about Kamito's invasion.

Suddenly, chains sprung from the ground and seized each of Kamito's legs.

"Wha!?"

What had caught onto Kamito's legs were shining «Shackles».

(.....This is!)

It was an Elemental Waffe he remembered seeing.

(If I recall, it was used by the ones who attacked Mille Bassett — «Guilty Snatch»!)

"—Hmm, it looks like you let your guard down, male spirit contractor."

".....!?"

The ones who arrived from the forest behind him were three girls wearing uniforms that were red with a single white line.

It was the uniform of the Holy Empire of Lugia's representatives, the «Sacred Spirit Knights».

".....Hey, what's the meaning of this?"

Kamito groaned with a sour expression.

"You mean why the «Sacred Spirit Knights» are cooperating with «Team Cernunnos»?"

The ones to advance to the finals in «Tempest» would only be the four teams with the most «Magic Stones». Excluding those who didn't really know what to do in the middle stages, the chance of teams allying in the latter stages was low.

"It is to redeem our stained honor, male spirit contractor. We won't allow you, who smeared the name of the «Sacred Spirit Knights», to pass into the finals!"

"Even if we cannot receive the honor of victory."

"For the sake of the wish Luminaris-sama has held for three years!"

The girls glared at Kamito with loathing.

(.....I see. In any case, they've put aside advancing to the finals and come to crush me instead, huh.)

Kamito sighed internally.

It appeared that defeating two of the spirit contractors from their team in the midst of protecting Milla Bassett had earned him their hatred.

The large and prominent Holy Kingdom of Lugia had sent three teams to this «Blade Dance». He wondered if it was a decision made with the conviction that it was fine to become a sacrifice as long as the favored «Paladin» Saint Luminaris Leisched's team made it to the finals.

While they had sent out three teams as well, this was their difference with the Areishia Empire representatives who were competing separately.

".....And isn't this completely a personal grudge."

"Say what you will. Before we face the Principality of Rossvale in front of the crowd, we will wipe clean here the disgrace of defeat that we suffered!"

The three from the «Sacred Spirit Knights» moved at the same time.

"Tch—"

Kamito tried to sever the «Shackles» with his divine power-filled sacred sword but—

It was repelled while giving off sparks.

(.....Est's output isn't rising!?)

Despite putting in the maximum divine power he could, the sacred sword's brilliance was still weak.

(Kuu, this truly is the center of a «Stronghold». The strength of the sealing barrier is on a different scale.....)

It wasn't just that his divine power output wasn't rising, his body also felt extremely heavy.

The powerful barrier protecting the center of the stronghold was harshly wearing down Kamito's strength.

Even if «Terminus Est» was of the most powerful class of Elemental Waffe, if the contractor couldn't supply divine power, it was just a regular weapon.

It was impossible to sever «Guilty Snatch» in this condition.

(Three skilled contractors, with a time limit added to boot. This is really rough, as expected—)

As he cursed in his heart, he readied his «Demon Slayer».

"Come, Giant Spirit — «Grendel»!"

Following the shackles contractor, another female knight summoned her contracted spirit.

What appeared from thin air was a giant-type spirit with sharp claws.

The giant bent its repulsive features and charged at him with a howl.

The waving claws that seemed to gouge even the air. Kamito's «Terminus Est» barely stopped that one attack — however,

(.....He's too heavy.....!)

Kamito grit his teeth.

If he stayed in the «Sealing Barrier» for too long, his strength would be exhausted.

His opponent was a power-type spirit that excelled in attacks utilizing physics. At this rate—

"Fufu, looks like this is the end, male spirit contractor!"

That instant. On the right arm of Kamito whose movements had stopped, yet another shackle was put on.

".....Two Elemental Waffen at one time!?"

"—Seems like you have let your guard down. «Guilty Snatch» is an Elemental Waffe that consists of shackles for both the wrists and ankles."

The female knight poured scorn on Kamito who clicked his tongue.

The giant spirit's claws dug mercilessly into the torso of Kamito who had lost freedom over his limbs.

"Kahaa.....!"

Kamito's body was easily blown away and smacked into the wall behind him. The mental damage from the spirit's direct attack and the physical damage taken from crashing into the wall assaulted Kamito at the same time.

(—A **wall**?)

While grimacing from the intense pain, Kamito thought doubtfully.

This is the interior of a deep forest. Up until just now, there shouldn't have been such a thing.

And as if to answer Kamito's—

From the ground rose successive large stone walls, encompassing him.

It only took a few seconds. The completed form were giant ramparts arranged in a circle.

"Fortress spirit «Isengard»'s Elemental Waffe — «Great Wall»."

The third female knight muttered in a cold voice.

"With this, you can't escape."

".....A fortress spirit. One of the earth attributes, huh."

Looking at the walls many times his height, Kamito groaned.

A spirit the same type as that Velsaria's «Dreadnought». It had the worst compatibility with the sword spirit Est.

Because of the difference in their ranks as spirits, at full power it would be possible to destroy them, but that would be difficult right now with Est not being supplied enough divine power.

"Since it seems like there's an excellent sniper in your team hiding."

"....."

It seemed like they were also aware of Rinslet who was hiding within the forest. With this level of solid ramparts surrounding him, he could not expect Rinslet's covering fire either.

(.....I am trapped. As expected of a top-class team.)

Kamito smiled wryly on the inside.

They had completely seen through «Team Scarlet»'s tactic that centered around Kamito.

It wasn't that he had been looking down on the «Blade Dance» representatives. Even so, there may have been a little carelessness in the corner of his mind.

This time's «Blade Dance» was a team battle. Teamwork would overpower individual ability.

".....Though I should have already understood that long ago."

—He had come to learn the complete opposite of what he'd been taught during his time at the «Instructional School».

You have nobody like an ally.

Trust in nothing but your own strength — that.

It seemed that warped training was much more deeply embedded in his heart than he had originally thought.

The giant spirit «Grendel» thundered out a joyful roar.

He could not move his limbs that had been bound by the «Shackles» satisfactorily.

"Kuu.....!"

".....mito.....Kamito!"

At that time. A girl's voice calling Kamito was faintly heard.

(.....The communication «spirit crystal»!?)

Since he had step foot within the «Sealing Barrier», the communications should have ceased but—

(Don't tell me, is Claire nearby?)

With a realization, he raised his head — and,

"What the heck!?"

The «Great Wall» user had her eyes open with shock.

The circular arrangement of ramparts surrounding him.

A single portion **was scorching red hot**.

It was an unbelievable degree of heat. The solid stone wall rapidly melted.

And then, the next instant.

"Goddess of ice and snow, by that frosted hand, crush my enemies — «Icicle Hammer»!"

A giant helical pillar of ice burst through the stone wall in one go, crumbling it into fragments.

(.....!?)

Outside the smashed ramparts—

The young girl with an ice bow prepared was smiling calmly.

Shining platinum blonde hair. Emerald pupils filled with elegance.

"Rinslet!"

"I'm here as well."

Next to her, a beautiful girl with red hair and Flame Tongue in hand, Claire was also there.

"Impossible, my «Isengard» was destroyed!?"

The fortress spirit contractor girl let out a trembling voice.

Flame attribute and ice attribute — it was crumbling that utilized the difference in temperature between these two. It had even destroyed that Velsaria's «Dreadnought», this combination attack from the Raven Class pair.

"Looks like you're having a hard battle. That's not like you."

".....Yeah, sorry."

To Claire who was shrugging her shoulders, Kamito replied with a wry smile.

He had never thought that they would come rushing this quickly.

His ojou-sama partners had also experienced the real battle of the «Blade Dance» and leveled up greatly.

Kamito readjusted and gripped his «Demon Slayer» tightly.

(.....I wonder what this is. Just by having my companions nearby, I also become so—)

There was no sense of losing. It didn't matter how much of a disadvantageous situation it was.

—There was no reason, he was just sure of it.

"—Sorry. It's our turn now."

A fearless smile rose onto Kamito's face.

In response to that vigor, the «Giant Spirit» before him gave out a cautious roar.

"A b, bluff! However many reinforcements there are, this is the center of a «Stronghold». Their contracted spirits' strength also can't be used sufficiently—"

"I wonder about that?"

A dignified voice came from overhead.

The shadow falling from directly above. The one that entered Kamito's raised vision, wrapped in a gale and gliding in sharply was the pony-tailed princess knight.

Held in her arms was the black-haired queen.

"—Ellis, Fianna!"

"You are my sword, you are my shield—"

With her eyes closed, Fianna began her spirit language releasing chant in midair.

Light particles were born from thin air and a rapier decorated with elegant ornaments appeared in her hand.

It was not just an ordinary rapier. That sword was surely the Elemental Waffe of the royalty's guardian knight spirit.

"Bearer of infinite light, cleanser of darkness—!"

"Now!"

Instantly, Ellis nose dived to the ground in a heartbeat and let go of Fianna in midair.

Skirt fluttering, Fianna landed next to Kamito. Keeping that momentum, she plunged the tip of her rapier deep into the earth!

"That name is — «Save the Queen»!"

The noble and clear voice shook the atmosphere.

In that moment, a beam of light surged forth from the end of the sword and drew a magic square formation around the two.

Turning the space within it's effective range into one's «Territory», it was an unparalleled Elemental Waffe.

"Kamito-kun, with this—!"

"Yeah!"

Kamito nodded with vigor. With the cancellation of the enemy team's «Sealing Barrier», divine power surged through his entire body like a raging gale.

"I'm counting on you, Est!"

Kamito supplied «Terminus Est» with the full might of his divine power and the sacred sword's blade gave off a fierce light as if to dazzle the eyes.

The «Guilty Snatch» that touched the blade's edge was severed with extreme ease.

"No way.....!"

The «Shackles User» female knight gasped with an expression of disbelief.

"As expected, they couldn't analyze an Elemental Waffe that has just awakened."

Claire, Ellis and Rinslet also swiftly gathered into the constructed «Territory».

A complete turn of the table.

"Y, you.....!"

"The glorious «Sacred Spirit Knight» have, to a second-rate team like you....."

At that time, the ground shook monstrosly.

".....This is bad, the «Beast Swarm Spirit»'s summoning ritual is activating!"

At Claire's words, he turned around with a realization.

On the other side of the fallen stone walls — directly beneath the shrine, a gigantic magic square formation was shining.

The «Druid» girl was standing above the tall wooden platform with arms spread open as she chanted the spirit language summoning.

"Kamito-kun, my «Territory» will only hold out for a few minutes more!"

Fianna said in an impatient-sounding voice.

Yes, this was her Elemental Waffe, «Save the Queen»'s sole weak point.

For using it in a real combat, the time limit was just too short.

"—Got it. We'll decide this in one go!"

Kamito dashed ahead with the shining «Demon Slayer» in hand.

Claire, Ellis and Rinslet also followed shortly after.

".....Kuu, protect the shrine, «Grendel»!"

Before Kamito and the others' eyes, the giant spirit had blocked their path.

It swung its arms that were like giant trees and attacked them in a half-crazed manner.

"Fuu, here I go! Freezing fangs, pierce — «Freezing Arrow»!"

Rinslet stopped and nocked an arrow, then fired her ice arrows blindly.

Drawing a gently falling arc, the intense downpour of ice fangs.

Each ice arrow that landed formed a pillar of ice which obstructed the giant spirit's incoming hand.

After that—

"—O wind, blow wildly!"

Ellis swepted her «Ray Hawk» and shot out blades of wind.

The wind blades tore through the the ice pillars, becoming a fearsome storm that was devastating.

«Ice Storm» — using their properties when they collided with each other, a combination attack.

The giant spirit's large frame was sliced to shreds by the ice blade storm, being eliminated within an instant.

"Damn, seize my enemies, O «Guilty Snatch»!"

The cornered spirit contractor turned once again to Kamito and released her «Guilty Snatch».

"I won't let you!"

Claire's Flame Tongue easily repelled the chains, then continued on to mow down the enemy.

"—Thanks for the help."

Having received his teammates' support, Kamito made a beeline for the shrine with a sprint.

Ahead of him, this time numerous stone walls appeared.

"—O «Great Wall», ambush my enemy!"

Fortress spirit «Isengard»'s Elemental Waffe. Different from the circular ramparts just before, perhaps because of the way it seemed to only concentrate on blocking the enemies ahead of it, the walls' thickness seemed to have multiplied.

However, Kamito did not stop running. Just like that, he plunged towards the stone wall.

"With this kind of thing, there's no way you could stop my Est!"

The «Demon Slayer» held in his hands gave off even more dazzling light.

Kamito brandished his sword and the stone wall before his eyes—

Crash. Crash. Crash. Crash. Crash. Crash. Crash.

".....No way, a sword spirit is destroying a fortress spirit!?"

With each time Kamito swung the sword, successive rubble from the stone walls danced in the air.

That was a scene that exceeded commonplace spirit contractor general knowledge.

Kamito, who had become a gale and arrived directly beneath the shrine, kicked off the ground and rose into the air.

"Ellis, I'm counting on you—"

"—Heroic wind, grant thy blessings upon this warrior — «Syphid's Feather»!"

The gale that Ellis produced enveloped Kamito and pushed him to the top of the shrine in one go.

".....!?"

The «Druid» girl opened her ice blue eyes widely.

Kamito pierced the floor with his «Demon Slayer» that was giving off light.

"Sorry. We must absolutely continue onto the finals."

With that, the shrine was split cleanly into two halves.

Chapter One

Victory Celebration

Pan! Papapapan!

Having set up a branch store in «Ragna Ys»' business district, the empire's nobles' cafe "La Parfait".

Within that shop, grand noises from crackers resounded.

"Congratulations on «Team Scarlet»'s advancement into the finals!"

The one giving her blessings with a smile was the maid, Carol.

"Fuu, it was the obvious outcome with me there!"

"As expected of you, ojou-sama!"

Rinslet swept up her hair and Carol clapped in return.

"Wait a second, you weren't the only one who did something."

"Uuu.....I was always providing support from the rear, but I also wanted to show off more on the front lines!"

"What use would a sniper be at the front lines....."

The seemingly astonished Claire tsukkomi'd.

At that everyday scene before him, Kamito thought,

(.....We've really returned, haven't we.)

And breathed a sigh of relief in his heart.

In an isolated field, for seven days, the constantly recurring survival battles between spirit contractors --- «Tempest».

Kamito and the others' return from that stage was already a while ago.

Being teleported to the «Divine Ritual Institute»'s grand shrine by means of transportation magic, the one who appeared before Kamito and the others was the «Fire Spirit Maiden» he had been under the care of previously, Reicha Alminas.

Standing before the nervous Kamito's group, she wore a tender smile as she read out the «Divine Ritual Institute»'s announcement.

«Team Scarlet»'s «Magic Stone» count is nineteen stones.

Congratulations, you will be advancing to the finals as the fourth team --
- she had said.

At that moment, the ojou-samas who normally fought without end hugged each others' shoulders and rejoiced.

And now, «Team Scarlet» had reserved "La Parfait" and were in the middle of a victory celebration.

"Fuaaa.....peach tarts, they look so delicious."

Claire's red twintails bobbed in a happy manner.

Atop the large wooden table, parfaits laden with cream like works of art, colorful ice cream, fragrant baked sweets, fruit combination platters and a wide variety of cakes were lined up.

".....Th, this squirrel-shaped cake is also cute. It's a pity that it's for eating."

"This cream puff has raspberries in it. It will serve as a good reference."

Gathered in front of the sweet confections, the girls frolicked innocently.

.....Somehow, it made one want to smile just looking at it.

"It's fun, isn't it, this kind of thing. We couldn't have a tea party in the middle of the real battle."

As Fianna raised a cup of black coffee, she smiled.

Yes, thanks to the pro-level cook, Rinslet, the contents of their meals were overwhelmingly extravagant compared to the other teams, but as expected, they had not been able to have an elegant tea party.

"That's true. On top of that, it has been a while since we have had a hot bath."

"While in the blade dance field, we made do with purifying in only a small fountain."

Rinslet gave a large nod in response to Claire's words. They had purified their bodies at a hamam in the city before the party.

.....Come to think of it, he could smell the the floral scent of shampoo wafting from their hair.

This was something that he had realized since the time he began living with Claire at the academy, that girls fresh out of the bath had a light and calming nice scent to them.

(.....Rather, isn't that a perverted thought.)

With lightly reddened cheeks, Kamito shook his head from side to side.

Scratch, scratch.

"Hmm?"

Looking over, the girl with silvery white hair that was sitting beside him was gazing expressionlessly at Kamito.

Mysterious violet eyes. White skin like fresh milk.



Kamito's contracted spirit, Est.

"Kamito, is there any tofu cake?"

"No, as I expected, there doesn't seem to be any tofu cake."

Kamito scratched his cheek in a troubled manner.

Tofu was a specialty product from Kamito's home town where he was born, a pudding made from soya beans.

Before, Rinslet had made him some and it seemed that Est had taken a liking to it.

".....Is that so."

Her shoulders sunken with disappointment, the legendary sword spirit.

"It's not cake, but if you want tofu ice cream, there's some here."

And Claire slid the ice cream plate to her.



".....So there is some!"

Est's eyes that had lost their light suddenly regained their brilliance.

"Tofu, tofu ♪"

While humming to herself in a song-like manner, she brought the spoon to her mouth.

That ever expressionless face became slightly lax around the edges of her mouth.

"That's great, Est."

While gazing at that happy-looking expression of Est's---

Kamito remembered.

(Now that I think of it, Est wasn't with us the last time we came here.....)

At that time, Est who had saved Kamito was temporarily annihilated from this world.

Having come into contact with the memories of her previous contractor, Areishia Idriss, she had closed off her heart.

(.....But just like this, Est has returned.)

Having accepted her destiny as a demon sword, she had opened her heart.

Now, Est was beside Kamito, and they were sitting with their friends around the table.

---That reality, it could truly be thought of as a miracle.

Kamito placed his hand upon the head of Est who was eating ice cream and,

"Fuua, Kamito....."

Est breathed out as she narrowed her eyes as though to indicate it felt good.

The ojou-samas glared at Kamito with dissatisfaction.

Ellis cleared her throat.

"However, we shouldn't be glad just yet. There's still the final battle."

"Yes. Moreover, each of the opposing teams' rankings were overwhelmingly above us."

".....That's true."

A heavy atmosphere hung over the table.

The other three teams that had advanced to the finals were mostly the ones that they had expected.

In third place, the «Knights of the Dragon Emperor» led by Leonora Lancaster.

In second place, the «Sacred Spirit Knights» led by Luminaris Saint Leisched.

And of course, in first place, «Team Inferno» led by Ren Ashbell. It was said that they had annihilated nine other teams and amassed a grand total of over fifty «Magic Stones».

".....Can we win, I wonder. Against that «Ren Ashbell»."

Fianna dropped her empty cup with a clatter.

"Fianna, are you okay?"

"Y, yes, my hand just slipped."

Fianna nodded as if to smooth it over.

(.....What?)

Because of her attitude that was not like her usual self, Kamito had a bad feeling but---

Just then, as if to dispel the heavy atmosphere in the air, the door's chime rang.

"Congratulations on your advancement to the finals, onee-sama!"

"Oh my, Mireille!"

Rinslet got up from her seat.

The one who opened the door and entered was---

Platinum blonde hair that shone as though it was basked with sunlight.
Glassy emerald eyes.

With a blue ribbon, that suited her well, a lovely girl.

Rinslet's youngest sister, Mireille Laurenfrost.

Mireille dashed towards Rinslet and buried her face in her bosom.

"Onee-sama, it was really great!"

"J, jeez, Mireille.....with everyone looking, this is immodest!"

Rinslet scolded Mireille with a red face.

.....It seemed even a level-headed ojou-sama went easy only on her little sisters.

"Ohh, I'd heard about it, but she's really a cute kid."

Claire murmured that and Mireille separated her face from Rinslet and turned in her direction.

"Ahh, onee-sama's friend from the academy, Claire-sama?"

"Yes, that's me."

Mireille gave a polite bow and,

"Nice to meet you! I had heard that Claire-sama was onee-sama's very close frie---mogogogo....."

In an instant, Rinslet had hurriedly covered her little sister's mouth.

"Wh, whwhwh, what is this girl saying, I wonder!"

"Mogogogogo~!"

"She's as attached to you as ever, Rinslet."

The wryly smiling Kamito.

Mireille escaped from Rinslet's hand and,

"Onii-sama!"

This time a sun-like smile turned towards Kamito.

"Onii-sama's blade dance was really cool!"

".....Yeah, thank you."

Kamito scratched his cheek in slight embarrassment.

Even if the one doing it was a nine-year old girl, being complimented so openly was embarrassing.

".....Hey, Kamito, what does she mean by onii-sama?"

Claire glared at him with an irritated face.

"Kamito, you've once again deceived a young girl....."

"Even if thirteen years old is forgivable, I expect that nine years old is a crime....."

Ellis and Fianna also turned ice-like glares towards him.

"Wai, wait a second, onii-sama doesn't necessarily have that meaning---"

"Kamito is my onii-chan."

While still expressionless, Est clung onto Kamito's waist from behind.

"That's also wrong! Rinslet, please clear up this misunderstanding!"

"Th, that's right! That Kamito-san is Mireille's onii-sama means, basically, th, thth, that I am, Kamito-san's....."

With a red face, Rinslet mumbled incoherently.

"Fufuu, onee-sama's being cute."

Mireille put her hand to her mouth and laughed innocently.

---And at that moment.

"Mireille, don't trouble your sister."

From the direction of the front door, a quiet voice came.

".....?"

Everyone turned to face that direction and a small girl wearing a white uniform with a red line was standing there.

Dark brown hair resembling a loose web. Noble, doll-like features.

And the most eye-catching of all, her azure right eye and amber left eye.
The mismatched odd eyes.

".....Milla!?"

Kamito let out a surprised voice.

The one standing silently by the door was Rossvale's representative, the «Rupture Division»'s captain, Milla Bassett.

"Kamito, congratulations on your advancement to the finals."

Milla muttered that in her usual robotic manner and,

Briskly walked to them and grabbed Mireille by the nape of her neck.

"Wh, what are you doing!"

Mireille struggled.

".....Ummm, what's going on?"

"I have become Mireille-sama's personal maid."

"Hah?"

"I suggested it. Milla-san is, from hereon, a maid of the Laurenfrost house serving Mireille."

At Rinslet's words, Milla nodded wordlessly.

"I am truly thankful to Rinslet.....I already cannot return to the motherland."

With her head slightly downcast, she gently touched her left eye that had lost its light.

«Sealed Magic Eye» --- carrying a powerful «Sealed Spirit» from birth, it was an extremely rare trait.

It was an existence which could be said to have been the «Rupture Division»'s trump card, but in order to protect Kamito and the others,

she had released the spirit within her «Sealed Magic Eye» and lost the power as a result.

Her actions which were an abandonment of victory were, in the eyes of the motherland, a clear betrayal. The Principality of Rossvale might be targeting her.

Considering that, accepting the protection of the Laurenfrost house which was one of the foremost nobilities in the major power Ordesia was truly something that could be called a good decision.

"Kamito---"

Milla looked straight at Kamito with her heterochromatic eyes.

"I do not regret my decision back then. Because I chose it myself."

".....I see. You're strong, Milla."

"---No. It's because Kamito taught me how to live other than as a tool."

Milla shook her head sideways and had a faint joyful smile on her.

"Milla, come eat cake with us."

Claire invited Milla over.

Despite appearances, she was unexpectedly someone who had good points like watching over others.

"But, I---"

"It's fine, it's fine. We're allies with the «Rupture Division», after all."

"Sharing a cup of tea with one's mistress is an important task for a maid!"

Whilst picking up cake, Carol said so with a smile.

(.....That's just because Carol wants to eat sweets, isn't it.)

Kamito tsukkomi'd that in his heart but,

"If it's like that, then---"

Obediently trusting in her maid senpai's word, Milla sat down next to Mireille.

"Come to think of it, Milla's still wearing her uniform from the «Rupture Division»."

Comparing it with Carol's attire, Kamito voiced that question and,

"We are currently in the process of tailoring a cute maid uniform."

"Yes....."

In response to Rinslet's reply, Milla nodded while fidgeting like she couldn't calm down.

.....It might unexpectedly be something to look forward to.

".....Milla in a maid outfit, huh. It feels like it would suit you well."

"Wh, what are you saying.....!"

When Milla's face flushed red, that moment.

The front door's chimes rang again.

"Who is it this time?"

Kamito turned his gaze in that direction and,

"Hmm, I've come, Kazehaya Kamito!"

"Geh!"

The one at the entrance was a small statured girl with her hair bound into a dango shape.

The «Four Gods»' imperial princess, Linfa Sin Quina.

"What's with that geh! That's extremely rude when facing me!"

With her traditional Quina Empire garments waving, she rapidly approached him.

"Ah, no, sor.....rather, what's the princess of the «Four Gods» doing here?"

"A delivery. I came to congratulate you on your advancement into the finals."

"Shao!"

The one who poked their face out from behind Linfa was the «Four Gods»' ace, Shao Fu of the «Byakko».

And then continuing on---

"Offering gestures of humanity to the enemy is a Quina Empire tradition."

"We've brought a lot with us!"

"You're holding a party in a fairly cramped place....."

Lao of «Seiryuu», Haqua of «Genbu» and Rion of «Suzaku» also appeared.

Each of them was carrying many bags of food.

"There's deep fried pork buns and skewered bird. They're famed products of the Quina Empire."

The many foods being heaped upon the table. All of a sudden, the interior of "La Parfait" was permeated with the fragrant smell of grilled meat.

"Y, you people, this is a noble's tea party!"

Rinslet raised an objection but,

"It's the middle of a party, so don't say such uptight stuff."

Linfa's group started sitting down without reservation.

".....~!"

".....Well, fine. Since we received their help in rescuing Fianna."



Claire shrugged her shoulders like she was astonished.

"Kamito---"

With that, Shao came over and sat next to Kamito.

The «Four Gods»' ace thrust a grilled chicken skewer into the table and smiled wryly.

"To be honest, it's a pity that we can't fight Kamito in the finals."

"If I remember, you and Linfa fought against Leonora's team by yourselves on the last day."

"Yeah. It was a fight that wouldn't shame the «Four Gods»' name. But they really were strong, those girls."

Shao sighed.

But that expression had no regret in it; rather, something joyful could be felt.

If they had chosen a lower ranked team, they could have possibly obtained «Magic Stones», but they had selected those «Knights of the Dragon Emperor» as their final opponent.

He wondered if that was due to the disposition of the «Four Gods»' ace.

"We'll be cheering on «Team Scarlet» in the finals."

"Yeah, thanks."

In order to face their respective battles, the two exchanged a solid handshake.



".....Whew, I'm stuffed."

"Even though it was food bought from a stall, it was pretty good."

Claire who was rubbing her stomach and Fianna who was elegantly wiping her lips with a handkerchief.

Due to Linfa's group's intrusion, the party had become like a banquet, but it seemed like Claire enjoyed it anyway.

Milla had taken Mireille back to the hotel and Linfa's group had eaten all they could and then left like a storm.

The ones left had been only «Team Scarlet» and Carol the maid. As a note, Est had eaten her fill and, possibly because she became sleepy, she had already reverted back to sword form.

"By the way, what will everyone be doing after this?"

While looking around at his teammates, Kamito asked.

Before the final battle began, it was customary practice for the «Divine Ritual Institute»'s princess maidens to offer rituals of gratitude to the «Spirit Kings».

During that time, the representing competitors were given a two day period of rest.

"I must go report about our advancement into the finals to my father and grandfather."

Ellis said with a meek face.

"Yeah, Ellis' family is a warrior class house, after all."

Kamito nodded.

"I must also visit my parents."

Rinslet also had her filial duties as a daughter of the Laurenfrost house.

These two had come to the party even though they should have had put more precedence on those matters first.

".....Me, too. I am reluctant to meet with those people, but it can't be helped."

It seemed like she didn't like being around the royal court, including the emperor and his wife. All of what had happened during the time she was called the «Lost Queen» seemed to have soured her opinion.

"It looks like we will be staying in the hotel arranged for by the empire today. Even though I wanted to finally kiss Kamito....."

".....H, hey, Fianna!?"

In response to Fianna who was sulking with her index finger in her mouth, Kamito's heart thumped and his face flushed red.

In that way---

The girls left and the shop interior became quite silent.

In the end, the ones left consisted of only Kamito and Claire.

Putting aside Kamito who was an orphan to start with, Claire's parents had been imprisoned following the «Calamity Queen» incident.

"....."

The two who became bored, for some reason or other, continued to sip black tea wordlessly.

".....Th, that's right!"

The first one to speak out was Claire.

"Yeah?"

"I'll be returning to the castle to brush up on my tactics."

While clearing her throat in a deliberate manner, she stood from her seat.

"Yeah."

At that time, Kamito realized it.

.....Couldn't help but realize it.

(.....What a face she's making.)

On Claire's face, a lonely-looking expression was displayed for a moment.

(.....She's a sixteen-year old girl after all.)

Now after all this time, he remembered that.

Usually she acted firm as the team's commander but---

With the advancement to the finals settled, her high-strung tension might have loosened a little.

Ever since that day four years ago, she had fought by herself until she met Kamito.

.....There's no way I can leave her alone. If I see that kind of expression.

".....Wait."

Kamito suddenly grabbed onto the the hand of Claire who was just about to leave.

"Fuaaa! Wh, whwh, what!?"

Claire's face turned red and she let out a ear-splitting scream.

"If you're free, then accompany me for a while."



".....Wait, what's this about?"

"We've finally come to the city so not having fun would be such a waste."

"We didn't come to play around. As the academy's representatives---"

"I know. But I think relaxing is also necessary."

While still holding the perplexed Claire's hand, Kamito walked along the street.

"Wh, what, that.....fuuaa, e, everyone's looking at us!"

"Don't mind it."

"D, don't mind it, you say, uuu....."

Maybe because holding hands was immensely embarrassing, Claire's face was beet red.

But it was necessary with this crowd. If they let go, they would end up separated without a doubt.

(Now then, what to do.....)

Kamito scratched his cheek as they walked down the main street.

Somehow he had ended up bringing her along with great zeal but---

He pondered as they walked and they arrived at a large plaza.

«Sacred Areishia Plaza» --- in the plaza bearing the name of the sacred maiden that slew the demon king, a large crowd of nobles clamoured.

The topic of their discussions were, of course, the «Blade Dance» finals.

Which country's representing team would win, what method would be used to decide the match, and finally, whether the «Strongest Blade Dancer» who was leading «Team Inferno» would display overwhelming strength once again in this competition.

In that kind of crowd, it seemed the faces of Kamito and the others who had advanced to the finals were already famous so stares of curiosity flooded in from around them.

There were favorable gazes amongst them, but there were also ones heavily laden with hostility here and there.

(.....Well, if a minor team won, there would be those who wouldn't like it.)

While pulling Claire's hand, Kamito shrugged in his heart.

There might be those inside these onlookers who knew Claire as the younger sister of the «Calamity Queen».

As expected, due to the high-born noble status they held, there were no openly rude comments being made, but even the favorable gazes didn't give off a good feeling.

"It might be a good idea to enter some place."

".....Th, that's true. If possible, a place where we won't draw attention."

"Yeah....."

Kamito looked around the plaza for a place and---

".....Ohh, they're showing an action drama."

His eyes had stopped on a small theatre.

An action drama was a form of amusement where the scene of a play was copied onto a special spirit ore and then projected onto a screen.

"That kind of theatre should have a relay of the «Blade Dance» on a large projector. Since the only ones that can enter the «Grand Shrine» as spectators are the high-born nobles.

".....I see. So they show the action drama while there's no real combat going on."

Kamito nodded as if in admiration.

And after seeing the theatre's signboard, she let out a gasp.

".....What is it?"

"That theatre, it's showing «The Three Catketeers»."

".....Cat?"

Certainly, there was a picture of three cats wielding swords on the theatre's signboard.

"Is that a famous work?"

"Yes. I've only heard rumors about it though and haven't actually seen it myself."

Claire gazed at the signboard like she was boring through it.

(.....It's because she likes cats, isn't it.)

"Okay, then let's watch that."

Kamito gave a wry smile as he pulled her hand and,

"Y, yeah!"

Claire nodded in a happy manner.

His heart throbbed uncontrollably at that innocent smile.

"Although saying that, it looks like there's still some time left until the showing."

"Ah, that's true. What should we do?"

"Shall we look around at a nearby souvenir shop?"

And at that time.

"Hrm, it appears that you've been training your teammate well."

".....!?"

Suddenly, he heard a voice from behind him.

.....He couldn't believe it. Even if Kamito had let his guard down in the town, she had approached without letting him feel even a shred of her presence.

(---And, this voice, it couldn't be!)

He turned around and.

There stood a bewitchingly beautiful woman with a mature charm.

Ash blonde hair that stretched down to her waist. Dressed in a jet black dress that seemed to have darkness interwoven, beauty like a carving, and eyes reminiscent of a falcon that shone sharply.

"---Greyworth!?" "Academy Director!?"

Kamito and Claire yelled out at the same time and,

"It's been a while, boy."

She shrugged her shoulders like she was amused.

Greyworth Ciel Mais --- the former number one of the empire's celebrated «Numbers». She had been named a hero of the Ranbal War and was the winner of the «Blade Dance» twenty four years ago.

Having taken the nickname of «Dusk Witch», the strongest spirit contractor in the continent.

"You, why would you be here---"

Kamito scowled at the witch before him.

"Hmph, how cold."

Greyworth slightly lifted her glasses with her fingertips and,

"Even though I expressly came here because I was worried about a pair of young lovers."

"Wha---"

"Kamito, what is she talking about?"

Claire turned to glare at him.

"W, wait, don't believe her!"

As if happy with watching Kamito's panicked condition, Greyworth chuckled lightly and smiled.

"It was a joke. As academy director, isn't coming to see what my pupils are doing a given?"

"I'm sure the «Blade Dance» is also being shown at the academy. What's going on with the academy?"

"I have left the academy to Freya. «Sylphid» is also doing well."

Greyworth then turned in Claire's direction and,

"Claire Rouge. I have seen the great efforts of «Team Scarlet». Especially in the latter half, your growth as a commander has been magnificent."

"N, no such thing, your words are wasted on me!"

Claire stiffened up and answered.

It seemed that even the academy's problem child was nervous before Greyworth.

For a spirit contractor girl, the name of the «Dusk Witch» held that much weight behind it.

(.....Although to me, she's just a super sadistic granny.)

Remembering the unreasonable training from three years ago, Kamito cursed in his heart.

(Still.....)

Why would Greyworth visit «Astral Zero» with this timing?

There was no way it was for the purpose of spectating the battle.

To begin with, the one who had baited Kamito with information on Restia and made him participate in this «Blade Dance» was Greyworth.

(---And she also proposed that I defeat the other Ren Ashbell.)

There was no doubt that something was happening behind this time's «Blade Dance».

And it was likely to be a combination of several predictions. Did this witch know what the masked girl masquerading as Ren Ashbell was planning---?

"....."

He could not acquire any information from Greyworth's grey eyes.

The witch would absolutely not tell lies. However, she also would not speak the truth.

.....Asking her any questions would be useless.

He wondered if he should propose a trade seeing as there was no other way to get information.

"It's the final break before the finals. You should enjoy it to the utmost."

Greyworth showed a smile on her face and patted both of their shoulders.

"Incidentally, our academy has no rules against relations between different genders. Do your best."

"H, hey!"

"Academy Director!?"

Claire's cheeks flushed red.

Greyworth disappeared into the crowd while waving at them.

".....What's with her."

Kamito muttered complaints under his breath and pulled on Claire's hand.

"So, let's go. It seems it would be a good idea to enter the theatre now."

"Y, yeah....."

Kamito turned towards and began walking to the theatre and Claire quickly followed after him.

The theatre's interior was unexpectedly wide and the two easily managed to get seats.

Perhaps because there was still time until the showing, the patrons were still sparse.

Claire was eating the peach crepe she had bought at the theatre's shop as if to show that it was delicious.

".....You sure can eat. You just ate not too long ago, is that okay?"

Kamito said while astonished and,

"It's completely fine, spirit contractors don't gain weight.....mm, this is delicious ♪"

"You have cream stuck to your cheek."

".....Eh? Fuaaa!"

He wiped the cream from her face with his fingers and Claire's face tinted red.

".....j, jeez, wh, what are you doing.....!"

Hit, hit, hit.

"S, sorry....."

Certainly, suddenly touching a girl's cheek might be a breach of manners.

Claire puffed her cheeks in an angry manner.

.....That action was strangely cute.

"Hey, Kamito---"

And Claire suddenly put on a serious expression and whispered.

"Yeah?"

".....Umm, what kind of relationship do you have with the academy director?"

"Y, you wouldn't happen to still be suspicious about what she said about a lover's outing?"

"That's not it. Come on, you said it before. That you had learned the same sword techniques as Ren Ashbell from the academy directory."

"Ahh, that thing....."

"Exactly when did you come to know the academy director?"

"Mm....."

While Kamito lightly scratched his cheek, he slightly averted his gaze.

".....Kamito?"

(.....Now then, what should I say?)

It was something that happened a year before Kamito debuted as Ren Ashbell.

(.....Well, it should be fine if it's a story about before I became Ren Ashbell.)

To a certain extent, telling her the circumstances might, on the contrary, dispell some of her doubts.

(Moreover, it would probably be a good idea to tell her about my relationship with Restia as well.)

He would probably end up fighting Restia again in the finals. With what had happened so far, he couldn't say that Claire and the others weren't involved anymore.

Claire gazed at Kamito with upturned eyes.

.....It looked like there was still time left before the showing of the recording.

"It will probably be a boring story about long ago?"

"It's fine. I'd like to know more about Kamito."

"Eh?"

Kamito questioned in return and Claire covered her mouth with a gasp.

"Ah, th, that's not it! It didn't have that meaning!"

"I know."

Kamito shrugged his shoulders with a wry smile and breathed out.

While remembering about those days, he muttered.

"I met with the «Dusk Witch» four years ago --- immediately after the destruction of the «Instructional School»."

Chapter Two

The Witch and the Assassin

.....Four years ago.

All of a sudden, the «Instructional School» was destroyed in the span of a single night by an evil spirit of flames.

Within the blaze, the boy snatched the ring the darkness spirit was sealed in and escaped to the outside of the facility. He, who had been raised as a tool of destruction and slaughter, continued to wander aimlessly through barren wastelands.

And then, several weeks later.

In the remote city he wandered to, the boy contacted a border faction of «Murders», a secret organization.

Without a sense of justice and knowing no other way to live than through his battle skills, he couldn't come up with any other option.

They had ridiculed the boy who came to their hideout with hair that had grown as long as possible and a tattered appearance.

What can such a young child even do, they said.

But as soon as their guards were beaten in a flash, their appraisal of him changed.

"I shall accept any job. The price is—"

The reward he was seeking from «Murders» was a single book.

A book that was sealed upon orders of the «Divine Ritual Institute», a forbidden text — «Key of Sulaiman».

The job he accepted in exchange was—

The assassination of the continent's strongest elemental, the «Dusk Witch».

And now, the boy — Kamito was blending into the night in the witch's courtyard.

The imperial capital's suburbs. The grounds were large, but as a home for the former number one of the «Numbers» that had been granted great peerage, it was plain.

Let alone a spirit protecting the gate, there didn't even appear to be a single servant.....though he already knew this from the information he had received.

The time Greyworth would return from the royal palace was drawing nearer and nearer.

Cloaked in darkness, Kamito touched the ring he had hidden within his jacket.

He stroked the words written on its outer edge in spirit language.

(.....If this goes well, I can free her.)

The one sealed within the ring was the darkness spirit girl.

The girl who had given human emotions to he who had become an empty tool at the training facility.

But giving emotions to Kamito, who should have been a tool, had angered the instructors, resulting in her being sealed once again.

Although he had succeeded in stealing the ring during the opportunity created by the «Instructional School»'s destruction, Kamito did not know how to undo the seal. In addition, the instructors who would have known how to undo the seal had all been killed by that «Evil Flame Spirit».

(But if I can just get the «Key of Sulaiman», then I can definitely—)

He would assassinate the continent's strongest elemental for the sake of getting back her smile.

He had not done an assassination mission yet, but he was confident that it was something he would succeed in.

The sound of a horse-drawn coach coming down the road. Kamito heard it with his extraordinary hearing ability.

(—This mission will be decided with the first attack. If I miss, I'm dead.)

This was the iron rule for when a non-elementalist fought with an elemental.

It seemed that all the assassination attempts on the «Dusk Witch» so far had failed.

The «Murders» bunch hadn't told him what had happened to those who failed. —Not that he really wanted to know.

The coach arrived before the gate.

Kamito covered the lower half of his face with a black cloth and drew the twin swords at his waist.

Special short swords forged from spirit crystals — items he had received at the «Instructional School».

They had no inscription. They were not actually designed for battle but instead were twin swords intended for use in a princess maiden's blade dance ritual; however, supplying divine power to the blade would allow it to also cut spirits so it was convenient for missions.

Even so, there was no comparison in performance with an elemental's «Elemental Waffe».

The door of the coach opened, and a woman with ash blonde hair came out.

Kamito sprung all his muscles into action and shot out from the darkness.

It did not leave any room for a reaction. He closed the distance in an instant and slashed out towards the woman's neck.

He felt a hard impact with his hands.

The twin swords' blades had stopped in midair.

".....!?"

"—Ohh, you're different from all the other ones."

Cloaked in a grey dress, the beautiful woman smiled bewitchingly.

In her hand was a single thick book.

That book had stopped the twin swords.

"Tch—!"

Shivers ran down his spine. That was something that he should have lost already, instinctual fear.

Those bottomless grey eyes pierced through Kamito.

(This person is—)

A monster — that word floated into his head.

He withdrew his twin swords and slipped into the darkness. Fighting any more than this would be meaningless.

Seeing as he did not take her down in a single strike, he would have to bide time until the next chance.

"My goodness, did you think you could just escape after aiming for a witch's neck?"

The «Dusk Witch» smiled like she was enjoying herself and put out her hand.

In an instant, a revolting lump of darkness was born from thin air.

(.....Is that a demonic spirit!?)

They had a different spirit structure and consequently could not be controlled by humans.

The one who could control them was — only the heretical «Dusk Witch».

The lump of darkness coiled around her arm and formed into a vibrating sword.

Even if he were not an elemental, he could feel it with his skin.

The one before his eyes was a top-class demonic spirit.

It was probably the same rank as Restia, no less—

(—Even though she's a retired spirit knight, she's contracted to spirits of this caliber!)

He had heard about it but — even though it was right in front of him, it was hard to believe.

Normally, a princess maiden's ability was at its peak from ten to the early twenties, and they would only weaken after that. Those elementals who had lost their power would retire, marry a noble of high birth, and pass their power down to their daughters.

If it was true that she had fought during the time of the Ranbal War, then her power should have weakened long ago.

A sharp flash split the air.

(.....Fast!)

He barely reacted by using his instincts, but the blade grazed him.

The cloth over his lower face was cut and fell gently to the ground.

"—Ohh, quite a cute girl."

The sharp grey eyes widened slightly.

".....I'm not a girl."

Kamito spoke for the first time.

He could not escape from his opponent's blade's reach. He would only be able to kill the moment he retreated.

(—Then there's no other way but to resolve myself.)

Kamito readied his twin blades and stared back at the falcon-like eyes of the witch.

"I have — come to kill the «Dusk Witch»."

He immediately kicked off the ground and closed the distance.

The godspeed slash was aimed at the witch's windpipe, but just before that.

The witch's figure swayed.

A moment.

"Absolute Blade Arts, First Form — «Purple Lightning»."

".....!?"

Greyworth's sword penetrated straight through Kamito's flank.



"Uu, mm....."

When he opened his eyes—

Kamito was lying atop a soft bed.

Clean sheets that smelled nice. Daylight flooded in from the large window.

(.....Where exactly is this?)

And with no time to guess,

"I'm surprised. That you were really a boy."

".....!?"

Kamito leaped from the bed at the voice he heard overhead.

No, rather, he tried to leap from it but failed.

It seemed that his lower half was numb and couldn't move.

Greyworth smiled like she was having fun and,

"Sorry, I allowed myself to cast «Binding» magic on you. It would trouble me if you ran wild."

"Kuu....."

"At any rate, moving will open your wounds. Even if I held back, my sword still pierced your stomach."

"....."

Certainly, his lower torso was aching with a dull pain. The bandages thoroughly wrapped around him were stained with blood.

"I have applied healing techniques. You should be fully healed in three days."

".....Why did you save me?"

"Because I've taken an interest in you. At such a young age, having strength incomparable to the other assassins, calm judgment ability and moreover—"

And she paused, then took out **that** and showed it to him.

"You were carrying a pretty interesting item. The legendary-class demonic accessory, «Sulaiman's Ring»."

".....Give, it.....back, give it back.....!"

Kamito widened his eyes and stretched out his hand as if possessed.

But those fingers only grasped air.

".....I'm surprised, you can move while under the «Binding». It appears you treasure this very much."

Greyworth smiled bewitchingly and leaned in close to Kamito's ear.

"Sorry, but I investigated your body as you slept. You possess a princess maiden's disposition to sympathize with spirits, it seems?"

".....!"

Kamito averted his gaze wordlessly.

It was impossible to deceive her. An elementalist of the «Dusk Witch»'s caliber could easily see through an elementalist's disposition.

"An existence that shouldn't exist in this world, a male elementalist — no, there is one in the history of the continent. That kind of abnormal existence."

As if taunting one who had taken the bait, the witch whispered in his ear.

"....."

"I wonder if this is the second coming of the demon king that once brought destruction and disaster to the continent. Truly a dangerous existence."

".....What do you intend to do with me?"

Kamito finally spoke.

If he was handed over to the empire, the chance to meet Restia again would be forever closed to him.

That was the only thing he definitely needed to avoid.

But to Kamito, who had a tense face,

"Boy, how old are you?"

A question with no relation to the topic was asked.

"....."

"Defiant, aren't you."

The witch began to fiddle with the ring in her hands.

".....Thirteen. I was taught that by the ones who raised me."

"Thirteen, huh. **Age-wise, that's enough.** And with this face—"

She muttered to herself about random things and then smiled.

"Boy, won't you become mine?"

"I refuse."

Kamito replied immediately.

"Don't conclude that so quickly. This is a trade. It's not bad for you either."

".....What do you mean?"

"What if I were to say I could release the spirit sealed in this ring?"

"What—?"

In an instant, Kamito's countenance changed.



The release of the sealed Restia. In return for that, what Greyworth wanted—

.....Unexpectedly was just housework.

"—I was certain you would be hiring me as an assassin."

Kamito voiced his doubts and,

"If you were stronger than me, then I might have."

She joked with a smile.

".....That's true, but why am I dressed like this?"

Kamito said with a stunned expression as he gripped the long skirt's hem.

For some reason, Kamito had been made to wear fluttery maid clothing.

His black hair that had been allowed to grow without cutting was personally combed by Greyworth and now had a glossy sheen.

—The image reflected in the full-length mirror was completely one of a girl.

"Truly, that suits you to a frightening degree. If you went out to the imperial capital like that, the boys wouldn't leave you alone."

Greyworth once again raised a voice of admiration.

"I'm not a girl. At least lend me normal clothes."

"Denied. I'm not just making you wear those clothes because I like to bully."

".....What do you mean?"

"If any of my guests were to find out that you are a male elemental, what would happen? If it's a high-potential princess maiden, then whether you're an elemental or not, it is simple to overlook."

"That's....."

Certainly, if it was discovered that he was a male elemental like the demon lord, it would cause a problem in no time. Those rumors might even reach the empire's top brass.

"Additionally, you are an unregistered elemental.....it goes without saying that the nation will regard a stray elemental as a great threat. If you were found out, Ordesia Empire may send out its spirit knights or even the «Numbers»."

.....He couldn't refute any of it.

As expected, without Restia, he didn't feel confident in escaping the empire's elite.

"What, it's not like it'll be for forever. I'll also think of a way. But I'll have you stay in the mansion for the time being."

".....I got it."

Kamito nodded as it couldn't be helped.

"Well, there is one other reason—"

"Yeah?"

"—Mm, don't mind it for now."

Greyworth shook her head to drop the subject.

"So, you can really free Restia, right?"

"Yeah. It will take some time, but if I use the Elstein family's «Sealed Library», I should be able to find the book you were looking for. Demonic accessories are outside of my specialty, but well, it'll work out somehow. Even like this, I'm still a university graduate."

"....."

He didn't understand what the «Dusk Witch» was planning. However, as long as he had no other way to free Restia, he would have to listen to her.

"Now, follow me. I'll guide you through the mansion."

Greyworth turned on her heel and went out to the hall.

Kamito sighed and followed after her.

At any rate — Kamito thought of a question.

.....The inside of the mansion had too few human presences.

"Why do you only have one servant?"

"Ahh, it's because the ones that work at this mansion aren't actually here."

".....?"

"You'll understood soon — since I'm saying while you're here."

Greyworth smiled wryly.

Kamito found it difficult to understand what she meant and—

The next moment. Suddenly, the hallway's window opened.

".....!?"

Kamito reacted instantly. Lifting the long skirt, he drew his twin swords that were strapped by belts to his thighs.

The ones that came from the window were two completely black boys. Held in their hands were short swords with a curved blade.

The assailants' moves froze for a moment.

That was obvious. Since an ordinary maid had just drawn weapons with practiced movements.

With that opening, Kamito closed the gap in an instant. Smashing the hilt of his sword into one's jaw, he rendered him incapable of combat, and with flowing movements, he pierced his blade into the second assailant's shoulder.

A silent scream. Immediately slamming his fist into the solar plexus, he knocked him out.

It hadn't even taken a few seconds to beat the two assailants.

Looking at their reactions amongst other things, they were reasonably well-trained, but for Kamito who came from the «Instructional School», they were not a match as an assassin.

Greyworth was calmly observing Kamito's skill in defeating the assailants.

".....What's with these guys?"

After confirming the two had truly lost consciousness, Kamito asked.

"Who knows? I'm quite hated by various groups. Outside of the empire, of course, and there are enemies within as well. Having an assassin come is a usual occurrence."

"Could it be that this kind of thing happens every day?"

"Cleaning up these kinds of guys is also the job of a maid."

Greyworth pushed up her glasses with her fingertips and smiled.

"But your sword style just now — those are genuine assassination techniques."

".....I know nothing other than this blade style."

"The style you learned from that assassin training organization you mentioned?"

"....."

(As expected, I was seen through, huh.....)

There was no use denying it. Following the destruction of the «Instructional School», the empire had sent out its knights, including the «Numbers», to investigate. What had been done at that facility; there was no way the military authorities or she who had been connected would not know.

"I don't particularly have an interest in your background."

Perhaps she had taken his silence as an affirmation as Greyworth shrugged her shoulders.

"It's just that that blade style is inconvenient in a variety of ways. **It's not suited for blade dancing.**"

"Blade dancing?"

Amongst the rituals elementalists offered to spirits, that was the programme with the highest social status.

To the orphans of the «Instructional School» who were completely master assassins, it was a word of no relevance.

Greyworth's grey eyes stared at Kamito as if appraising him.

"—Boy, have you ever wished that you wanted to become strong?"

".....Strong?"

Kamito was perplexed at the question that was suddenly raised.

Wanted to become strong — thinking that way, there shouldn't have been even an occurrence up to now.

But he had been ordered to become strong. And in reality, if he hadn't become strong, he would not have been able to survive at that Hell-like facility.

He pondered on that subject for a while—

".....I don't know."

Kamito shook his head.

"At the very least, I don't think I've wished that I wanted to become strong — I think."

"—I see."

Greyworth nodded to herself as if coming to an understanding.

And with eyes as if she pitied something about him, she turned to Kamito and—

"You are strong. Most likely, it would be fine to call you the single strongest master assassin on the entire continent. But that is, after all, an empty strength."

His chest became abuzz at Greyworth's words. He opened his mouth as if to retort.

"—It's not like I wanted to become strong."

"Hrm—"

Greyworth placed her hand on her chin as if her interest had been peaked and,

"First of all, it seems it is necessary to open the boy's eyes."

And as if having been struck with an idea, she gave a profound smile.



—From then, a few days' time.

Kamito worked devotedly as a newly hired maid at Greyworth's mansion.

"Kamito, heat the bath. I don't like it hot, so I'm counting on you to keep it mild."

"Yeah."

"Next I'd like you to clean the garden. Prune the shrubs as well."

"Got it."

"Kamito, dinner. I would like subtly seasoned Laurenfrost-style meat cuisine."

"I can't make that kind of thing!"

"There's a recipe, isn't there? Everything is an experience."

"Whatever happens, I don't know anything....."

Of course, Kamito had not done anything like cooking until now. Despite that, he somehow managed to make something resembling meat cuisine and Greyworth ate without leaving any leftovers as she voiced complaints.

The most troubling thing about being in the empire was that one could not use flames satisfactorily.

The cause was the «Calamity Queen»'s revolt that had happened several weeks before the «Instructional School» was destroyed.

The enraged spirit king razed the empire's territory and erased all flames within their lands.



Due to this, every time Kamito wanted to use fire, he had to head to the «Spirit Forest» that flourished outside the capital city to catch a fire attribute spirit.

There were still other things that troubled him.

"Kamito, wash my body."

"Wha!?"

Kamito's face reddened and,

"It's a joke. Hrm, you're still a kid in those matters."

"Kuu.....!"

Kamito glared at his inhuman master, but his lovely maid clothes nullified its impact and,

"Maybe I should have you be my partner for tonight."

".....Ah, uu....."

"Fufuu, you're really cute."

It seemed like it stirred up her sadistic heart instead.

(.....This is also for the sake of freeing Restia.)

While Kamito said that to himself, his household skills had improved.

But his most important job was not housework. In-between housework, he had to fend off the assassins that came seemingly every day aiming for Greyworth's life.

".....You're really hated by various groups."

Kamito muttered with sarcasm and,

"I wasn't as peaceful back when I was a knight as I am now."

".....You've become peaceful now?"

Kamito once again remembered fear.



Like that, one day. Greyworth went out from the mansion.

"I'll be visiting the royal palace. Do the laundry and clean the mansion until evening."

"You don't hate politics?"

"I can't ignore a direct summons from His Majesty the emperor. And the subject this time isn't unrelated to you."

".....What do you mean?"

Greyworth shrugged her shoulders and explained in response to Kamito's query.

It appeared that a few days ago, the report from the spirit knights on the «Instructional School» was announced and the details of the inhuman experiments were coming to light one by one.

Amongst the founding members of that facility, there were a number of important nobles so the imperial court was buzzing like a disturbed bees' nest.

".....I bet."

In the organization, the «Instructional School»'s battle technicians were well-hidden, but from the contents of the missions, it was possible to guess the clients' statuses and situations.

Although to begin with, the ones who had investigated them were elementalists specialized in information gathering that were roughly equal to his ex-teammate, Lily Flame.

"Well, the founding members were nobles of this empire but they seem to have all gradually moved to the «Demon King Religious Clique» from Alphas Theocracy that was backing the organization."

Greyworth took a breath and,

"The fanatical devotees of the demon king — the ones who scouted you after finding out about your prowess as an elementalist were also those Demon King Religious Clique guys, right?"

".....I don't know."

Kamito shook his head sideways. Certainly, the elders at the «Instructional School» seemed to believe that the male elementalist Kamito was the second coming of the demon king.

"Because I was a tool that embodied their wills."

"....."

Greyworth stared at that sort of Kamito for a while and,

"Oh boy, it seems drastic measures are necessary."

".....?"

"Ahh, that's right—"

In front of the hall preceeding the foyer, Greyworth said that as if she had remembered something.

"Also clean my study today."

"The study?"

Normally she would say it was fine even if he didn't clean the study.

.....What a strange turn of events this was.

"Cleaning just the floor is fine. I've told you many times, don't touch things that don't concern you."

".....Got it."

Even while he thought of a question, Kamito nodded obediently.



After Greyworth left the mansion, Kamito immediately began cleaning.

It had started off as an unfamiliar maid job, but he had finally gotten the knack of it.

As he walked down the hallway that had an expensive carpet spread out along it,

(.....I really didn't know anything other than fighting.)

All this time, he had never been allowed to realize that.

The disciples of the «Instructional School» were only tools for the purpose of slaughter. They were never taught unnecessary knowledge.

Restia had bestowed him with knowledge of the outside world, but their time together had been too short. Particularly in their first meeting, Kamito had not seen her as anything other than an enemy he had to defeat. (—He wondered if the «Instructional School» was completely dissolved by the empire.)

He didn't have any particularly strong feelings about that but—

The one that crossed his mind was the girl with ash grey hair that had disappeared into the flames.

The girl that had called him her brother and adored him.

The second-place «Monster» of the «Instructional School» — Muir Alenstarl.

Was she done in by those flames or captured by the spirit knights, he wondered.

(Either way doesn't seem likely.....)

Shrugging his shoulders, he opened Greyworth's study with the key he'd been provided.

Books were ordered and lined up on the bookshelf that covered an entire wall and a bunch of documents were piled up on the office desk.

".....It looks like what she said about being a university graduate is true."

Kamito muttered and stepped into the room with broom in hand.

.....It was a larger room than he had imagined. Perhaps to prevent the deterioration of research materials, there was no window. In its place, a spirit crystal's illumination lit up the entire room dimly.

A glass wardrobe was adorned with raw spirit crystals and a collection of demonic accessories. They were undoubtedly items of absurd prices.

—And amongst them, he realized there was a gaudy medal left carelessly.

"This is....."

In the center of a wooden shield, a beautiful spirit crystal was embedded, and Greyworth's name was carved on the metal plate.

".....The medal given to the victor of the «Blade Dance», huh."

The elementalists' festival that happened once every several years or possibly several decades in «Astral Zero».

It seemed this was an item from over twenty years ago when the «Dusk Witch» had won.

"Blade dance, huh....."

He remembered what Greyworth had said a few days ago.

—It's just that that blade style is inconvenient in a variety of ways. It's not suited for blade dancing.

Is what she had said.

He wondered what the difference was with the sword techniques that had been hammered into him at the «Instructional School».

(—My sword techniques could not reach the «Dusk Witch».)

He was sure that she had said «Absolute Blade Arts»—

As if stabbing through the blank in one's consciousness, it was an inexplicable sword technique. Until now, that was the only sword technique that Kamito had not been able to see through after one time.

(.....Why?)

—You are strong.

—But that is, after all, an empty strength.

(.....I don't get it. I know nothing other than that strength.)

Moving away from the wardrobe, this time he looked upon the desk.

And there.

".....!?"

Seeing an item that would surprise anyone, Kamito gasped.

An ancient book with leather bindings.

The title carved in spirit language was — «Key of Sulaiman».

(.....No way, she already obtained it!?)

Of course, it was not the original but a copy. Be that as it may, it should still have information on the legendary-class demonic accessory, «Sulaiman's Ring», that Restia was sealed in.

"....."

Kamito stretched his hand out without hesitation. Kamito had not really studied languages, but thanks to Restia, he could roughly decipher the meaning to some extent.

.....If he at least understood the method, the process itself didn't seem too difficult. If he used the ritual equipment gathered in the room, he should be able to begin the spirit freeing ritual immediately.

The shrill sound of a bell resounded.

".....!?"

It was the notification that an intruder had entered the mansion's «Barrier».

"Kuu, at this kind of time—"

Clicking his tongue, Kamito turned his gaze to the door—

Those eyes opened in surprise.

(—Since when!?)

A shadow with a small build draped in black cloth was standing on the other side of the door.



Kamito immediately changed his thoughts into battle mode.

His opponent was short with a feminine physique.

A girl — if it was, the chance of her being an elementalist was high.

Kamito quickly reached for the twin blades beneath his skirt and gathered divine power into his hands.

This was the first time an elementalist assassin had come to the mansion. By no means, they should not be of the remnants from the «Instructional School» but—

"It's unfortunate but the «Dusk Witch» is not here."

"....."

Kamito said those words but the assassin was not perturbed at all. She stood there wordlessly while sending out killing intent.

(Greyworth isn't the target? If not, then what exactly—)

An instant. From the assassin's fingers, a sphere was formed.

Aiming at Kamito, she launched the sphere.

(Spirit magic.....as I thought, an elementalist!)

As he reflexibly moved to dodge — he realized.

On the desk behind him was the «Key of Sulaiman» that was necessary for freeing Restia.

He turned around in an instant. He stopped it with the twin swords infused with divine power — but,

".....Guu!"

Even if it was infused with divine power, something like a sword couldn't deflect spirit magic. The black orb that hit the blades exploded right in front of him. Kamito's body was blown away violently and smacked into the wall.

".....Ku, ah....."

At the spot the ball had exploded, a hole like the air had been gouged out opened and the fragments of the twin swords that had stopped the spirit magic had been eliminated without a trace.

".....«Annihilation» magic, huh!"

This one was on a different level from all the assassins that had come to the mansion before—!

The assassin wordlessly shot several black orbs at him.

Kamito quickly grabbed the «Key of Sulaiman» and threw himself to the ground.

The black spheres exploded overhead. The shards from the wooden wardrobe that was broken by the technique grazed against his cheek.

(.....Don't tell me, the target is this book!?)

And yet, his opponent was firing her magic carelessly.

He decided the objective wasn't recovery but destruction and—

Kamito tightened his grip around the book in his hands.

(.....I definitely will not let go of this.)

—This book was the sole key to freeing that girl.

(Restia.....)

The girl with black wings that wore a night-colored dress.

When they had parted, the last smile she had shown him was deeply etched into his mind.

With the remains of the twin sword in his left hand and the copy held in his right hand, Kamito confronted the assassin.

Essentially, with the book's safety as a priority, he would prefer to retreat at this point, but unfortunately there were no windows in this room and the sole exit had an assassin standing in it.

(It seems I have no choice but to defeat her—)

The assassin held out her fingers.

Instantly, black spheres fired out consecutively — there was nowhere to hide in the room.

But that was with the general knowledge of an average battle technician. Kamito kicked off the floor and moved from the wall to the ceiling in but a moment, avoiding all the orbs with minimal movement.

The specialty of the «Instructional School»'s assassins, meta three-dimensional movement — moreover, Kamito's version of that had been nicknamed «Shadow Weaving», otherworldly movement.

".....!"

The first signs of agitation were born in the black-clothed assassin.

Kamito **kicked off the ceiling and jumped**. Closing the distance in an instant, he released a slashing attack.

—But the blade fruitlessly cut only air.

The assassin's image disappeared into thin air like a mirage.

There was no particular reason for surprise. With an elemental as an opponent, it was a natural thing.

He calmly checked for a presence — and overhead, the air slightly wavered.

".....!"

Rather than confirming the enemy by sight, Kamito quickly took evasion maneuvers.

A moment later, the place Kamito had been standing at just before was peppered with «Annihilation» magic."

The floor that had become nothing was gouged out along with the air.

If that hit directly, a person would vanish without a single trace.

(I can't let it touch me even slightly.)

Kamito gripped the copy even tighter.

(—I will definitely protect this!)

That time. Kamito realized.

(—I see, this is the first time I've fought this kind of battle.)

And.

Without any orders, he wanted to protect something by his own will and was fighting while strongly desiring that.

The assassin swooped down before his eyes. In her hand was a blade made through magic.

The flash of a blade ran. Kamito promptly whipped out his one-handed sword, protecting the book against his chest.

The one-handed sword was eliminated as if it had been absorbed.

The assassin kicked off the ground again and moved into striking distance.

(Cra—)

Just before the assassin's blade touched the copy.

Restia's smile once again flashed across his mind.

(—I won't let you!)

"Ohhhhhhhh!"

Kamito instantaneously infused his left hand with divine power.

Normally, an elementalist with no contracted spirit could not use spirit magic. However, Kamito concentrated his divine power to the utmost limit and created a pseudo-blade of divine power.

It was possible in theory — but it was the first time it had ever succeeded.

The surging divine power blade deflected the assassin's «Annihilation» sword.

On top of that, the black cloth mask was lightly cut.

The cloth gently fell from her mouth.

"—I'm surprised. To think that other than through spirit magic, you would pull out a blade of divine power."

".....!?"

The one who smiled fearlessly was—

With clear grey eyes, a beautiful **girl**.

"You are—"

"—This is a reward for that. **See through it this time.**"

And then, the sword flash burst out.

"Absolute Blade Arts, First Form — «Purple Lightning»."



"Uu, nn....."

He awoke on top of a soft bed.

(Somehow, it feels like this has happened before.....)

In his hazy state of mind, he thought that.

"It appears you've finally woken up."

The bewitching voice that came from close to his ear.

Turning around, he found Greyworth sitting at the bedside smiling.

".....What was that all about?"

Kamito asked looking displeased.

.....No, that wasn't a good question. He somewhat understood her objective.

"Is there something lacking in my sword?"

"That's right. Since rather than through theory, it's faster to learn with the body."

"....."

The thing lacking in Kamito's sword.

That was the existence of something to protect.

Certainly, when he had fought to protect the book — namely, Restia, the sensation he had from that resolution to protect felt like it had sharpened his entire body into a blade.

"—With the body, huh."

Kamito said cynically and pushed on the top of his shoulder which was hurting.

What Greyworth had unleashed last: that blade technique.

If Kamito's reaction had been even a moment too slow, it would have pierced his heart.

"The ones who've seen through my Absolute Blade Arts twice consists of only you. It's praiseworthy."

".....If I hadn't seen through it, I'd be dead."

"Well, that may be true."

Kamito sighed at the witch who was without a shred of timidity.

"Anyway, your form back then, what exactly—?"

At that time, the face he had glanced beneath the black cloth was a girl of about fifteen years of age.

Her stature was also much smaller. If it was the same physique as right now, perhaps Kamito would have seen through her identity at the beginning.

"I changed my body a little. I can restore my youth with a certain cycle."

—In the past, that was the «Wish» the «Dusk Witch» had obtained.

And for some reason, Greyworth muttered that as if in self-derision.

"Eternal youth.....don't tell me, ageless and immortal?"

"It's not that convenient of a thing. It's not something separate from this world, the spirit kings' blessings, that is."

She shrugged her shoulders and—

Opened the «Key of Sulaiman» she had in her hands.

"—Now then, it was a promise. Have the ring in your hands."

".....Y, yeah."

Kamito took out the ring and placed it on his palm with a nervous face.

Greyworth lined up the ritual tools on the ground with practiced movements and held her hand over the ring, then began chanting the words of releasing written in the book.

".....!?"

The ring in his hands shone bluish white.

Moreover, the spirit language characters inscribed on the front face flashed as if burning—

In the next instant, a fierce gale raged within the room.

"Uwaa—"

His vision was shrouded by black fog.

No, it wasn't fog, instead there were whirling black feathers.

Shining with darkness, the wings that were more beautiful than anything in this world.

"—This is surprising. I didn't think it would be a spirit of the highest rank that can take on a human appearance."

Greyworth raised a voice of admiration.

"Restia....."

Kamito's lips were quivering and his outstretched fingers touched the wings.

"—I was waiting, Kamito."

The freed darkness spirit girl—

Placed her hand on Kamito's cheek and smiled gently.



"And, well—"

Kamito cleared his throat and,

"—The meeting between Greyworth and I was like that."

Averting his eyes slightly from Claire, he ended the story.

.....As he expected, talking about things from far in the past was a little embarrassing.

"....."

While Kamito was telling his story, Claire had not once spoken and simply gazed at him as she listened.

"You, that sounds like it was troublesome....."

"Yeah, because of Greyworth, I faced death many number of times....."

The «Dusk Witch»'s Absolute Blade Arts had been beaten into his body.

To tell the truth, he didn't really want to remember those unreasonable days of training.

"Umm, that's not it.....no, it's fine."

Claire corrected herself as she shook her head.

"So, what happened next?"

"Next?"

"With the freed darkness spirit. I don't really know much about her."

".....Th, that is—"

Kamito hurriedly averted his gaze. If he continued the story any further, he would need to talk about the birth of «Ren Ashbell».

Just then, the lights in the theater went out and the surroundings became pitch black.

It appeared the action drama was finally going to start.

"It looks like it's going to begin. We'll continue this next time."

".....It can't be helped."

He heard Claire's sigh in the darkness.

"But I'm a little jealous."

"Yeah?"

"Because both the academy director and that darkness spirit girl know the Kamito from the past."

"....."

"Hey, Kamito—"

"Yeah?"

".....I'm cold. Warm me up."

Claire placed her small hand on top of Kamito's palm.

"What an extravagant ojou-sama....."

Kamito smiled wryly and held that hand softly.

".....I'm not jealous, okay."

Claire's voice was drowned out by the sound of bells from the showing.

Chapter Two

Interlude

The Dusk Witch

In a room of a high-class hotel built in «Ragna Ys»' business district.

Greyworth looked down out the window at the night view that stood out against the darkness.

"This might become the last «Blade Dance» that these eyes see."

She narrowed her eyes and felt slightly sentimental.

She had debuted and won twenty four years ago. She was fifteen at the time.

At that time, the «Blade Dance» system was still working properly.

Three years ago, an unseen crack had appeared.

And now, the current competition obviously had unusual circumstances arising.

It had been a short cycle of only three years from the last tournament. The participation in battle of a darkness spirit that was not the user's official contracted spirit. The grotesque existence that wasn't a spirit contractor, let alone human, «Nepenthes Lore»—

(—Just what exactly is starting here?)

Coming to «Ragna Ys» had been done under Greyworth's personal judgment. Watching over her pupils' activities was just a public camouflage for the empire's top brass.

(.....Although, they'll already have realized something of that degree.)

Greyworth pushed her glasses up and silently moved away from the window.

She was continuing her personal investigation into the other Ren Ashbell that had appeared in the current tournament. When the «Murders»' merchant, Vivian Melosa, that had been caught behind the scenes was interrogated, her name had come up.

The «Murders»' merchant was connected to the executive and secret part of Alphas Theocracy's religious organization. Because of that, Vivian Melosa had known a lot of information concerning that Ren Ashbell.

According to her story, the masked girl had appeared at the empire two years ago. It seemed she entered the religious organization's secret agency called «Snake», and in a short few months, she had risen to the top of the organization.

The tactical-class military spirits that had been bought with the empire's capital amounted to twelve. It seemed that the amount of subordinate spirit contractors, including orphans from the «Instructional School», was already over twenty.

(.....It's not for terrorism. It's almost like war preparations.)

That kind of girl was leading the elite and participating in the «Blade Dance».

What exactly was the «Wish» that she kept to herself—

(At any rate, it's not world peace.)

She sighed deeply—

"—While this heart still beats, I must pass **that** on to the boy."

The witch placed her hand softly against her chest.

Chapter Three

The Ice Demon and the Hell Cat

Chirp, chirp chirp.

A small bird's chirping could be heard outside the window.

The second morning following the conclusion of the «Tempest».

Kamito was abandoning himself to pleasant slumber.

".....Onii-sama. Please wake up, onii-sama."

Ruffle ruffle. Ruffle ruffle.

"Uu, nn.....Est, let me sleep a little more."

Kamito groaned in the bed. His fatigue from the real battle hadn't been abated yet. At least for today, he wanted to sleep to his heart's content.

"Jeez, onii-sama, you sleepyhead!"

An amazed sigh.....somehow, it seemed like she had given up.

Kamito was relieved, and at that moment.

Kiss ♪

A soft sensation upon his cheek.

".....Wha!?"

Kamito's sleepiness was completely blown away.

He shot up in the bed and,

"Ahh, you finally woke up!"

The beautiful girl with shining platinum blonde hair met him with a sunny smile.

"Mi, Mireille!?"

Kamito yelled in a fluster.

The one there was Rinslet's younger sister, Mireille Laurenfrost.

The tidy white dress and accompanying red ribbon were very lovely.

"Good morning, onii-sama."

Mireille gave a polite bow.

"Good morning, Kamito."

Beside her was one other person, a cute girl.

It was Milla Bassett, the leader of the «Rupture Division». The fundamentally black clothing complemented her somewhat wavy dark brown hair.

Rather than that---

"What on earth is it?"

Kamito asked as he rubbed his drowsy eyes.

".....Umm, I have a request for onii-sama."

"A request?"

"Yes, onee-sama and Claire-sama are fighting in the room."

"Ahh, again....."

Kamito groaned.

It had settled down since coming to «Ragna Ys», but those two had fought constantly in the classroom back at the academy.

.....That had resumed, it seemed.

"It's something that happens all the time; won't it be fine if we leave it?"

"At this rate, the castle room will be destroyed."

Just after Milla said that, a fierce quake came from the hallway.

"Never mind a classroom, breaking a building of the «Divine Ritual Institute» is, as expected, not good....."

Kamito wearily sighed and got up from the bed. Ellis, who would normally plunge right in, was currently out of the castle.

"By the way, what about Carol?"

"She's probably still sleeping. That Carol, she just won't wake up unless onee-sama gets her."

".....This is the first time I've heard of a maid that's woken up by her master."

.....Kamito was as amazed as ever at the ever-useless maid.



Quickly moving down the tremoring hallway, Kamito arrived at Rinslet's room.

"I was not at fault!"

".....~wh, what, are you trying to say I was!"

.....The argument could be heard even outside the door.

"Hey, you two---"

Kamito opened the door and entered, and just then.

"Freezing ice demon breath --- «Freezing Fang»!"

"Eat this, scorching conflaguration --- «Fireball»!"

The offensive spirit magics clashed within the room. Kamito was blown away by the impact and smashed into the corridor wall.

".....Guaa!"

"Kamito-san!" "Kamito!?"

The two exclaimed in surprise and quickly dashed to his side.

"H, hey, what were you thinking!"

Claire sounded worried as she peered at Kamito's face.

".....Y, you guys, were you trying to destroy the room?"

Kamito shakily stood as he pressed on his dizzy head.

".....Th, this has nothing to do with you!"

"Th, that's right! This is our problem!"

The two ojou-samas averted their eyes as if uncomfortable.

"---I called for Kamito-sama, onee-sama."

And from the other end of the corridor came Mireille's group.

"Mireille....."

"It's because you two wouldn't stop fighting at all."

"Th, that is, n, not my fault!"

Rinslet puffed her cheeks as if pouting and turned away.

".....So, what's the cause of this fight?"

Kamito asked with a sigh.

"It's Claire's fault!"

"It's Rinslet's fault!"

The two pointed at each other and sparks erupted between them.

"Well, calm down. I'll listen to both of your stories."

".....~!"

With that, with tears gathering in her ruby eyes, Claire showed him a book.

Guessing from the cover illustrations, it was one of Claire's favorite romance novels geared towards teens.

"What happened with this book?"

"Rinslet spoiled its conclusion!"

Claire glared at Rinslet with teary eyes.

".....Huh?"

"I, I thought you had already read it!"

"I haven't read it yet! Even though I was looking forward to reading it when we returned to the academy."

"I, in the first place, you're the one who started talking about that book!"

"W, wait, wait!"

Kamito hurriedly cut in.

".....You guys, you were fighting about this kind of thing?"

"What do you mean this kind of thing!"

"Ah, no....."

"I, it's fine already, you don't have to return this book!"

Claire screamed with teary eyes and left with her twintails standing on end.

"Hey, Claire---"

"H, hmph, just do what you want!"

Rinslet folded her arms and turned her head to the side.

"Oh, boy....."

.....Well, this kind of fight happened all the time. It shouldn't get too serious.

He heard someone lightly clear their throat.

"I've shown you a distasteful side of me, Kamito-san."

Rinslet looked like she felt awkward as she twirled her hair around her finger.

".....You two, can't you get along a bit more?"

"Th, there's no way we can get along!"

Rinslet's face reddened and she bit her lip.

"I'm working together with her because we're in the same team right now, but we're originally fated rivals!"

"Rivals, huh....."

Come to think of it, these two were long-time childhood friends.

Certainly, there should be no problem if Kamito were to cut in more.

"Well, at any rate, tomorrow is the finals. Be sure to make up before then."

Kamito shrugged and was leaving, and then---

.....Growl. That kind of idiotic sound came from the hallway.

"Kamito-san?" "Onii-sama?"

Rinslet and Mireille raised their eyebrows in puzzlement.

".....Could it be that you haven't eaten breakfast?"

"Y, yeah, I was just awoken by your little sister not too long ago."

Kamito nodded with a tinge of red across his cheeks.

In an instant, Rinslet's face lit up with pleasure.

"I, if that's so, I was just about to make something. I, if you'd like, you can also eat."

".....Really?"

Truthfully, it was a very tempting offer. He could get breakfast through room service if he asked the princess maidens, but Rinslet's breakfast would definitely taste better.

At any rate, she wouldn't lose even against a pro chef.

"Well then, maybe I'll take you up on that."

"I can't make anything extravagant because there's no real kitchen, but I'll make do."

Rinslet nodded cheerfully.

"Ah, onee-sama, I want to eat with you, too!"

In response to Mireille who put her hand up cheerfully,

"Mireille has already eaten breakfast."

Milla the maid pointed that out calmly.

"I, it's fine! If it's onee-sama's cooking, then I could eat endlessly---"

Milla caught hold of Mireille by the nape as she tried to enter the room.

"Fuua, what are you doing!"

"It is Mireille's study time."

"I don't want to! Coming this far, I don't want to study!"

"That won't do. You won't become an outstanding noble like that."

"Nooooo, onee-sama's breakfast~!"

Milla dragged along the struggling Mireille.

Before long, they'd turned the corner and Mireille's shrieks couldn't be heard anymore.

"She's really the former leader of the «Rupture Division»; even at thirteen years old, she's got her act together."

.....Unlike a certain useless maid, she would become an excellent maid.

Rinslet excitedly began putting on an apron.

".....Is there anything I can help with?"

"Fufuu, do not worry. Please just sit and wait."

Rinslet took out a frying pan from the shelf and started up the fire spirit crystal in the kitchen in the corner.



"Hmm, hmhmhmm~♪"

Rinslet was making pancakes as she hummed. As he gazed at the Rinslet's lovely hair swaying and felt the appealing fragrance of honey---

Kamito picked up the novel that Claire had left behind just before.

(....."The Lady Blooming in the Dead of Night". Yet another generic title.)

He skimmed the contents.

It seemed to be about an unyielding beautiful noble girl that was caught by a cruel demon lord, becoming his prisoner, and the succumbing of her mind and body.

(.....Hmm, Claire only likes these types of book.)

While thinking that, he closed the book and,

"It's done."

The apron-wearing Rinslet turned towards him with a beaming face.

There were three pancakes upon the plate, all laden with plenty of honey. The crispy burn marks looked really delicious.

"Now then, eat up ♪"

"Yeah. Itadakimasu."

Nom. Kamito stuffed his cheeks with the pancake on his fork and,

".....Delicious!"

Said just one thing in a voice of praise.

The interior was fluffy while the outer surface was fried just right.

The Laurenfrost specialty butter and honey were also superb.

"Just as expected. It's fried to perfection."

"Fufuu, I'm glad."

Rinslet gazed happily at Kamito who was stuffing his cheeks.

"What is it?"

"N, no, it's nothing!"

He asked with a puzzled expression and she averted her eyes shyly.

While Rinslet was spacing out, Kamito ate up the deluxe pancakes.

".....Ahh, that was delicious. Thank you for the meal."

"Fufuu, if you'd like, you can have my share as well."

Rinslet passed him another pancake.

".....Mm, is that okay?"

"Yes, I don't eat much in the morning."

"Then I'll accept."

Nom nom nom.

".....J, just like that, you can also move on to eat me?"

"Huh?"

"J, just talking to myself!"

Rinslet hurriedly shook her head.

---After Kamito finished his breakfast, Rinslet poured some after-meal black tea.

The black tea was poured into teacups and the rich fragrance of Laurenfrost tea leaves filled the room.

It seemed the black tea had been prepared beforehand. She might have actually planned to have breakfast together with Claire.

(She might have intended to talk about that book.....)

Kamito reached out for the book on the table.

.....He tried asking something that he'd been curious about for a while.

"So you also read this kind of book."

"Th, that is.....!"

In an instant, Rinslet's face reddened.

"That is, I was introduced to it by Claire at first, a, and if you read it, the contents are deeply intriguing, so I'd like you to not think of me as an immodest girl! I am, to the end, a person of scholarly pursuit---"

She defended herself while bashfully rubbing her knees together.

"I don't think it's something you need to be embarrassed about."

Kamito smiled wryly and returned the book to the table.

"But to be sharing books, your relationship is quite good."

"I, it's just an inseparable relationship!"

Rinslet averted her gaze.

"I see, an inseparable relationship....."

Kamito took a sip of the black tea and,

"So you've been rivals since childhood, right?"

".....Well, yes."

"If you're okay with it, would you let me hear about that? About when you were kids."

"W, why?"

"Well, you two are always fighting. I was just wondering if it's been the same since long ago."

"....."

Rinslet placed her hand upon her cheek as if thinking about it a little and---

Before long, she breathed in like she recalled a distant day.

".....It will be a little long. I'll boil some more tea."

She stood up quietly from her seat and placed the kettle on the fire spirit crystal.

"This is about when I first met her and acknowledged her as my rival."

"When you first met her?"

"Yes. That was exactly ten years ago. It was when my father brought me to give our greetings to the house of Marquis Elstein---"

As if lost in nostalgia, she began telling the story softly.



Ten years ago when Rinslet accompanied her father on a visit to the Elstein territory. A time when Rinslet was still six years old.

Rinslet's father, Frontier Earl Laurenfrost, was planning to get the opinion of the Duke Elstein household's head which produced successive generations of «Fire Queen» on the ritual that would be devoted to the «Fire Elemental Lord».

The earl was bringing along his daughter so she could meet her future schoolmate of the same age, Claire Elstein.

"The Elstein house is prominent even within the empire. Get along with Lady Claire."

"Whether we get along or not depends on her."

Earl Laurenfrost sighed at his daughter's composed six-year old face.

Her domineering personality was a secret worry of the earl's.

---The one who came to greet the two that had traveled a long distance by coach was the head of the Elstein house, Wolfram Elstein himself.

"Well, well, thank you for coming from so far away."

He was a great man with the presence of a high noble. His wife was still working at the imperial court in the capital so she wasn't present.

"I am the Laurenfrost's eldest daughter, Rinslet Laurenfrost. I will be in your care this time."

Rinslet held the hem of her dress and curtsied elegantly.

Even if she was six, she already conducted herself like a model noble.

"Ohh, as expected of the Laurenfrost house's daughter. She's got her act together. I wouldn't think she was the same age as my daughter."

"No, no, your daughter is also quite lovely---"

"....."

Rinslet paid no mind to the socially controlled interactions of the adults.

Her emerald green eyes were staring to the spot directly behind Duke Elstein.

Twintails like animal tails were bobbing.

The girl in a white dress seemed to be cowering behind the duke.

(.....What's with her?)

Rinslet sharpened her gaze and the girl shrunk back even more.

.....She's like a small rabbit.

(.....She's nothing like what one would expect of the daughter of a high noble household.)

Rinslet appraised her as such on their first meeting.

"Claire, greet Earl Laurenfrost and Lady Rinslet."

".....~F, father!?"

The girl widened her ruby eyes and panicked.

"U, umm, that, I....."

"Claire, calm down."

"Y, yes....."

Claire took a deep breath and,

"I am the second daughter of the E, Elstein house, Claire Elstein."

She gripped the edges of her skirt and lowered her head.

"Haha, what a sweet daughter."

"No, it's quite embarrassing that she has such a deathly fear of strangers."

Duke Elstein shook his head with a wry smile.

"....."

Rinslet mercilessly surveyed the girl before her.

Red Twintails tied at each end of her head. The ruby eyes peeking out.
The white dress suited her slender build quite well.

She was outstandingly good-looking.....there was no denying it.

However, beyond that---

(She's not very interesting.....)

That was Rinslet's honest thought.

(I was expecting a little because she was a family member of the famous «Fire Queen».)

Rinslet had already lost interest in Claire.

"Come to think of it, where is your other daughter?"

And Earl Laurenfrost voiced his question.

"My apologies. She collapsed from offering a ritual to the earth spirits.
After a large ritual, she always sleeps for three days."

"Your daughter is already being entrusted with the earth spirit rituals?"

Earl Laurenfrost spoke with surprise and Rinslet also widened her emerald eyes.

There should only be three years' difference in age between her and the Elstein household's eldest daughter, Rubia Elstein. As expected, it was a shock that the earth spirit ritual was being left to someone of only nine years of age.

"It seems my elder daughter has potential as a Queen. I plan to enter her into the «Divine Ritual Institute» next year."

"Ohh, the «Divine Ritual Institute». That's quite major."

The Elstein house had a history of producing numerous «Fire Queens».

The eldest daughter might become a Queen candidate in the future.

(.....Rubia-sama is amazing. Completely different from her younger sister.)

That younger sister had a slight smile on, perhaps because she was happy that her sister was praised.

"Well then, Earl Laurenfrost, let us discuss this time's ritual in the upper guest room."

"Yes. Rinslet, you play with Lady Claire."

".....Eh? F, father!?"

Rinslet showed a rare flustered condition.

(.....I have to play together with her? This isn't a joke!)

"U, umm....."

Claire also seemed bewildered.

"Rinslet, you're a noble with honor, so you cannot shirk your responsibilities. Now, let's go, Duke Elstein."

"N, no way! Father---"

As if cutting off Rinslet's appeals, the door shut ruthlessly.



".....Umm, wait. Wait a second."

Kamito set the teacup down on the table with a clack and---

Interrupted Rinslet's story.

"What is it?"

She knit her brows, seemingly unsatisfied from having her story cut off.

".....No, well, is that really Claire?"

Kamito asked with an expression of half belief, half disbelief.

.....What he'd heard so far didn't sound like the Claire of now at all.

(.....Rather, it's like an entirely different person.)

"It sounds unbelievable, but it's the truth. That girl used to be shy and docile long ago."

"I, is that so....."

Well, even now she had some areas resembling a fear of strangers and he also knew she had her gentle and girly points.

(Even so, you know.....)

"May I continue?"

Rinslet cleared her throat.

"Y, yeah....."

Kamito nodded while still perplexed.



---When Duke Elstein and Earl Laurenfrost came out of the guest room, it had already been several minutes.

Claire hid behind the curtains and seemed to be observing the mood of Rinslet who was twirling her hair with her finger.

(Haaa, I'm bored.....)

Even though Rinslet was approaching her limit, not much time had passed.

"Hey, Claire-san?"

".....Eh?"

Claire's shoulders shook as if frightened when Rinslet called out to her.

"I am your honored guest. Could I at least get some black tea?"

".....Ahh! Y, yeah!"

Claire nodded and hurriedly brought back a tea pot. Inside the tea pot were small fire spirit crystal fragments which warmed it.

"Ohh, you're using fairly good tea leaves."

"Yes, we used the best black tea because a guest was coming."

Rinslet voiced her compliment honestly and Claire smiled happily.

"Ahh, we also have snacks. They're really delicious!"

Claire ran off and came back with a plate of cookies from somewhere.

"They seem delicious. Did you make them?"

"No, it's a souvenir that father bought at the capital. I really like the snacks there."

"Hmmm....."

Rinslet elegantly picked a cookie up with her fingertips and placed it in her mouth.

"This flavor is quite good. I like it."

".....I'm glad."

Claire felt relieved since she had been nervous.

While Rinslet sipped black tea, she looked around the guest room.

As expected of a prominent family of the empire, the interior design was extravagant. The taste in furnishings was also good.

However, unfortunately, there was nothing that would alleviate her boredom.

"Haa, I'm bored....."

While holding her head in her hands over the table, she sighed.

"U, umm....."

And Claire started to mumble as if trying to saying something.

"What is it? If you're a noble's daughter, then clearly say what you want."

"U, umm....."

Claire repeatedly opened her mouth and,

"I, I have dolls!"

"Dolls?"

"Y, yeah, I'll bring them now!"

Claire nodded happily and dashed out of the room.

".....What?"

While staring blankly, she waited and---

At last, Claire returned with both arms filled with stuffed toys.

All of them were lovely cat dolls.

"Here. Choose the cat you like."

Claire lined up the cat dolls on the carpet and,

"I'll lend you this. It's my favorite cat....."

She pushed a red cat plushy onto the perplexed Rinslet.

"Nya---nya---♪"

"....."

"Nya---?"

".....Are you making fun of me?"

Rinslet threw aside the cat plushy.

".....Eh?"

"Something as childish as playing with dolls, there's no way I'd do it!"

".....S, sorry."

Claire once again became sullen.

(.....I, I might have been a bit too harsh just now.)

.....Being shown such a sad expression, she'd obviously feel bad.

Rinslet cleared her throat and,

"A, aside from dolls, is there anything else that could relieve my boredom?"

"Y, yeah, umm, then.....a storybook?"

"Storybook?"

Rinslet asked without thinking.

"Do you, by any chance, read books?"

"Yeah, Rubia-nee-sama taught me how!"

Claire ran off again and this time returned with a heap of books.

"What an impressive amount....."

"I really like interesting books. What about you?"

"W, well, I do read. If it's a book on politics, history or spirits."

Rinslet said while putting on airs.

"Wah, amazing! I, I like storybooks!"

The girl that had been hesitant until just now had her eyes sparkling as the conversation turned to books.

"Like this, or this, and this and this, all are really interesting!"

She piled her favorite books one by one in front of Rinslet.

"H, hmph, storybooks are for children!"

Rinslet, who had no interest in novels, turned her head to the side.

"But, they're really interesting....."

Claire cleared up the books while looking sad.

".....Is there anything more interesting?"

"Umm....."

Claire pressed her lips together as if troubled and,

"Hah....."

Pressed her cheeks in slowly.

".....W, what are you doing?"

"An interesting face....."

"....."

Rinslet sighed deeply.

".....Haa, I wonder how long our fathers' conversation will take."

"I was told it would continue until evening."

"Evening!?"

Rinslet's face stiffened.

"You're joking; I'll die of boredom!"

"Yeah, so let's read a book together!"

"A book....."

At that moment, Rinslet remembered something.



"Come to think of it, I heard that there is a collection of treasured magic books in the Elstein house's underground «Sealed Library»."

The rumor of the Elstein house's sealed library was widely known amongst the empire's nobility.

All sorts of rare books covetous to elementalists were supposed to be gathered there.

There might be a book there that would peak Rinslet's interest.

"It's just the perfect thing for getting rid of boredom!"

Claire rushed to stop Rinslet who stood up with great vigor.

"Y, you can't! Father said we had to stay in this room. Moreover, there are dangerous sealed magic books in the underground library---"

"Oh my, are you scared?"

Rinslet challenged her.

"That is....."

"You don't really have to come along. I'll just search on my own."

"Ah, w, wait---Rinslet-chan!"

Rinslet left the room and Claire chased after her.

Rinslet turned around in front of the door and turned to glare at Claire.

"Wait, who gave you permission to call me by name?"

".....Eh?"

She thrust her finger out at Claire who was staring blankly.

"Okay? Call me the daughter of Earl Laurenfrost."

"But, onee-sama said you call friends by their name---"

"W, who is your friend!"

"Fuua....."

Rinslet screamed out and Claire backed away with teary eyes.

".....Hmph, I won't acknowledge a crybaby coward as my friend."

Rinslet turned away and quickly walked away alone.



"---It's here, isn't it."

The aforementioned «Sealed Library» was inside an annexed library.

A sturdy iron door stood before Rinslet.

".....Darn, it's locked."

It was obvious it would be. There were hundreds of dangerous spirit magic books in there, after all.

"Yeah, that's why, let's go back to the room already."

Claire tugged on the hem of her dress.

"Enough with the sleep talk. This kind of lock means nothing to me---"

Rinslet gave a fearless smile and started chanting with the spirit language quietly.

Doing so, all at once, the six locks were filled with keys of ice that fit just perfectly.

Turning them, the door opened with a heavy sound.

"Amazing.....!"

"Hmph, this much is obvious if one plans to enter Areishia Spirit Academy."

Long stairs that continued downward were behind the door.

There was no light; it continued in pitch black darkness.

"A, are we really going in?"

"Oh my, are you getting cold feet?"

".....I've heard something. That there's a bad spirit inhabiting an old book."

"Hmph, you really are scared."

Rinslet said it like she was amazed.

"Truthfully, I'm disappointed. That a family member of the Elstein house which the «Fire Queen» belongs to would be this kind of coward. If the little sister is like this, the older sister must also be not much---"

"Stop talking bad about nee-sama!"

Rinslet closed her mouth in realization at Claire's icy voice.

"I am nee-sama's little sister. I am no coward."

The girl glared at Rinslet with tears in her ruby eyes.

".....Is that so."

Rinslet shrugged.

"Fine. If so, then come along."

".....O, okay."

Claire nodded as if she'd made her resolve.

(.....For now, it seems like she has the will.)

The two continued down the stairs.

"It's dark, isn't it. Is there no lamp or spirit crystal light?"

Rinslet sighed and,

"---O flames, illuminate."

Claire created a small shining flame on her palm.

"Oh my, you can use spirit magic?"

Rinslet was surprised. To be able to use spirit magic at this age, she has a lot of potential.

"Nee-sama taught me the basics."

"Hmm, you really are the daughter of the Elstein house that governs flames. Although it's not up to my level."

---And at that time. She realized something.

Even if it was beginner-level, that she had managed to use a spirit magic endowed with the flame element meant that---

"Could you possibly already have a contracted spirit?"

"Yes, I have one."

Claire nodded.

"Really?"

She was becoming more and more surprised. Having a contracted spirit basically marked her as a full-fledged spirit contractor.

"Show me for a bit. Your contracted spirit."

"I can't. It's bad to summon a spirit unnecessarily if you're inexperienced."

Claire replied with sound logic. But Rinslet didn't back down.

"Oh my, if you won't show it, I suppose it's that low of a spirit?"

"Y, you're wrong, «Scarlet» is a very strong spirit!"

"If that's so, then prove it."

".....~!"

Claire was lost in indecision for a while but---

It was not okay for a spirit contractor to take a contracted spirit lightly.

Finally she nodded resolutely and,

".....Fine, I'll make a special exception to show you."

She took out a stick of chalk from within her dress' skirt.

She drew a magic square on the wall with difficulty and began chanting the spirit language summoning ritual.

---Guardian of the crimson blaze, keeper of the undying hearth!

---Now's the time to abide by the blood contract, come forth and do my bidding!

In an instant, a «Spirit Seal» in the shape of «Flames» surfaced on the back of her right hand.

A small fireball appeared from the center of the magic square and suddenly became the figure of a hellcat enshrouded in flames.

It was about the size of a squirrel, a small and adorable kitten.

"This is Scarlet."

Claire hugged the hellcat veiled in flames in her arms.

"Oh my, it's quite small, isn't it."

Rinslet smiled with composure and,

"S, Scarlet may be small, but she's powerful!"

Claire puffed her cheeks.

"Well, I'll give you credit for being able to summon your contracted spirit. But it cannot compare to my «Fenrir»."

«Fenrir» was the high-level spirit Rinslet had contracted on her sixth birthday.

She drew a magic square on the wall like Claire and chanted the spirit language summoning ritual.

---Oh freezing beast with Ice-teeth, merciless hunter of the forest.

---Now is the time to abide the contract of blood, hasten to my side as commanded!

A «Spirit Seal» representing «Ice» appeared on the back of her right hand.

And a fierce icy wind stormed through the stairway and---

A large white wolf appeared from thin air.

"Amazing.....!"

Claire's ruby eyes widened.

"Fufun, isn't he?"

".....Cute!"

Rinslet fell down.

"H, he isn't cute or anything like that; Fenrir is a ferocious white wolf!"

"Kuun....."

Fenrir let out a sad cry at being called not cute by his master.

"That's not true. He's really cute."

Claire touched Fenrir's fur and,

"D, don't just touch him as you please!"

Rinslet shot out her finger and returned her contracted spirit to «Astral Zero».

"Ahh....."

"Now then, let's go."

"W, wait---!"

Claire also sent Scarlet back and hurried after Rinslet.

---The two continued to descend down the endless stairs.

"This is pretty long. Rather, is there even a bottom?"

"Rinslet-chan, isn't it about time to head back....."

"Stop calling me Rinslet-chan!"

"Y, yeah.....sorry, Rinslet-chan."

"Haaa, whatever already!"

Rinslet sighed, astounded.

Finally, the stairs ended and the two arrived at the «Sealed Library».

It was a large space with a high ceiling. The air was chilly.

Claire held the flame light aloft, showing the many tall bookshelves.

"So this is the famous sealed library."

"Yeah, what an amazing amount of books.....!"

It seemed that it was also Claire's first time setting foot in here so she couldn't hide her excitement.

Indeed, the bookshelves were lined with books that seemed to have history to them.

"---I wonder if these are about rituals."

Rinslet slowly took one of them in hand.

The instant she blew away the dust on the cover and opened it,

"Kyaa! W, what is this!"

With a beet red face, she threw the book.

"W, what's wrong!"

"Th, there was a picture of holding hands with a gentleman!"

".....H, hands!?"

Claire timidly turned the book with a dubious expression.

"Fuaaa, t, this one has them I, linking arms!"

"Wh, whwh, what immodesty!"

The two screamed kyaa, kyaa.

For the sheltered noble ojou-samas, it was much too stimulating.

Rinslet roughly closed the book.

"Th, this is a book for adults! Let's search for a different book!"

"Y, yeah, that's right.....!"

The two were flushed red as they exchanged nods.



---Dozens of minutes later.

Rinslet piled the books she had taken from the shelves onto the floor.

".....Phew, there was worth in coming. This is an amazing collection."

For some reason, she slapped the books with old leather covers that had complicated characters on them.

She didn't really understand the contents, but she had just gathered every book that had extravagant binding and looked difficult.

"Rinslet-chan, can you read books written in spirit language?"

Picking up one of the books from that pile. Claire spoke out in surprise.

Rinslet pressed her lips together. She had received education for gifted children ever since she was a child, but as expected, she still couldn't decode spirit language.

"C, can you read it?"

"Yeah, just a bit. Nee-sama taught me."

Claire nodded.

Rinslet instantly puffed her cheeks as if displeased and,

"H, how impertinent!"

"Fuua, Rinfure-hyan, it hauts!"

She was pulling on Claire's cheeks.

And then.

".....?"

Claire's shoulders slightly stiffened.

"What's wrong?"

While questioning her, Rinslet released Claire's cheeks.

"Y, yeah, just now, there was something---I felt a chill."

"A chill?"

Rinslet knitted her brows.

The underground library was cool, but not to the point of shivering.

"Come on, please don't scare me!"

"But, I really---"

Whoooooooooosh---

".....Kyaa!?"

Rinslet screamed out without thinking at the blast of cold air from somewhere.

"Rinslet-chan....."

"I, it's fine, it's just a draft."

"But there was no draft until just now."

Claire whispered that, sounding worried and started looking around at the surroundings restlessly.

.....Just like a frightened small animal.

(.....Jeez, it can't be helped.)

Rinslet shrugged slightly and---

Held the shivering Claire's hand.

".....?"

"Relax. I'm here."

"Y, yeah....."

It seemed she'd calmed down as her hand stopped shaking.

".....Rinslet-chan's hand is warm. It's like nee-sama's."

"Wh, what are you saying! I'm a cold ice demon!"

Rinslet's face reddened and she averted her eyes.

"At any rate, this is....."

The sound of the blowing wind was gradually getting stronger.

The books on the ground were flapping and their dress' skirts were flying up.

Just what exactly was happening---

".....It seems like a good idea to return."

Rinslet muttered and just then.

"---Who is the one who has disturbed my slumber."

A ghastly voice resounded within the underground room.

"Kyaa!"

"Wh, what!?"

"---Who is the one who has disturbed my slumber!"

This time, a louder voice from far away shook the lines of bookshelves.

".....Fuaaa!?"

The two pressed against each other and cringed.

"Rinslet-chan, th, that book---"

Claire pointed at the ground and yelled. It was one of the books that Rinslet had brought over. The page that had been opened by the wind was giving off bluish white light.

"Could it be that there was a «Sealed Spirit» sealed in that book!?"

"What did you say!?"

«Sealed Spirit»---it was a general term for spirits that were sealed into magical items as a result of their ferocity.

It was an existence that an elementalist with little experience should fear the most.

"Th, that kind of dangerous thing was in that book---kyaaa!"

Lots of dust was falling from the ceiling as a result of the room's rumbling.

And then---

"---Who is the one who has disturbed my slumbeeeeeeeeeer!"

A magic square of light formed around the book.

A giant ice figure appeared in the middle of the blinding light---!

".....!"

That was a dragon---no, it was a large lizard crafted of ice.

Of course, there was no way that was a natural living creature.

It was a spirit. ---And an extremely strong one.

"Ice salamander---....."

Claire muttered in a trembling voice.

"You know what it is?"

"I read about it in a book. It's a terribly ferocious ice beast spirit....."

"....."

Rinslet gulped at Claire's words.

The giant ice beast that appeared from the magic square leered at the two with its red eyes.

"So you two are my offerings....."

Waving its long tongue, it slowly moved towards them.

It seemed it happened to be able to understand human language, but it didn't seem like the kind that one could have a conversation with.

(.....There's no way but to do it!)

Rinslet resolved herself and quickly chanted the summoning.

"---Answering to my command, come forth, magic ice spirit «Fenrir»!"

In a moment, the white wolf appeared from thin air. With a sharp roar, it attacked the ice beast.

"I, I did it!"

Summoning without a magic square was a dangerous bet but---

There was no prey the magic ice spirit could not hunt.

---But in the next instant. Rinslet's victory smile froze over.

The ice beast swung its tail and blew Fenrir away.

Fenrir smacked into the wall and was scattered into particles with only one attack.

"No way.....!"

A hoarse cry came from Rinslet's throat.

The magic ice spirit «Fenrir» was a high-level spirit that had served generations of the Laurenfrost house. It was an existence far above sealed spirits like that one.

But its contractor, Rinslet, was no more than a six year old girl. Because of her inexperience as a spirit contractor, it could not unleash its full potential.

"---Foolish girl."

The ice beast's long tongue licked Rinslet's cheek.

"Ah, ahh....."

Her entire body cowered in fear.

(It's my fault.....)

Rinslet heavily regretted her actions.

It would have been best to just do as Claire had said and obediently played with dolls back in the room.

(It's my fault that even she---)

She turned her gaze backward and Claire was on her knees shaking.

"Claire, you have to escape at least!"

"I, I can't.....!"

Claire shook her head intensely.

"It's fine, so run. Protecting the weak is also a part of noblesse oblige!"

Rinslet yelled in a quavering voice and stood before the ice beast that was closing in.

"Rinslet-chan!?"

"Hurry, now!"

"No! I can't just run and leave a friend behind!"

"Claire---"

In an instant, the giant ice beast's claws flashed.

"Kyaaaaaa!"

Rinslet's small body was easily blown away and smacked into the bookshelf.

A dull sound from the impact echoed and a great deal of books fell.

The shredded white dress was dyed with the pure red color of blood.

"---.....!?"

A sharp scream gushed forth from Claire's throat.

".....Ah, h.....kuu....."

"Rinslet-chan, get a hold of yourself! Rinslet-chan!"

She could hear Claire's voice from far away.

She could tell that blood was leaving her from her entire body.

(I was really foolish.....)

In her hazy conscience---

Regrets swirled around.

.....I thought I could do anything. I had nothing to fear.

She had not realized until now that that was just the conceit of youth.

(At least, that girl.....)

She wanted to at least save the girl that had called her a friend.

"Quick.....ly, run.....away....."

".....Forgive."

"Eh?"

Even while on the verge of losing consciousness, that voice reached her ears.

"---I definitely won't forgive you!"

".....!"

She finally realized that was Claire's voice.

The red twintails were swaying like a burning fire.

(.....Wh, what?)

Her body was hot. The surrounding temperature was rising.

The ruby eyes that housed flames glared at the «Ice Salamander» as if piercing it.

The ice beast that was slowly drawing closer stopped for a moment as if it felt fear.

"---Born of nothingness, the flames governing destruction!"

The spirit language chant spun from her lips.

It was not an informal chant. It was a true chant that drew forth the utmost of one's divine power.

Rinslet's conscience was awakened by that unbelievable scene.

"---Don't tell me, «Fireball»!?"

It was a middle-class fire element spell.

The ice salamander roared.

It swung its claws to stop the chant---

Just before that, the spirit magic was completed.

"Take this, incinerating conflagration --- «Fireball»!"

The swelling blaze engulfed the surrounding oxygen and attacked the ice beast.

Rinslet reflexively protected her forehead from the raging explosion she expected.

However---

".....?"

Even ignoring whether it struck the ice beast, there was no explosion.

(.....What is that!?)

On the other side of the wavering air---

The red lotus of flames had greedily devoured the ice spirit.

It was like a giant carnivorous predator had massacred its prey.

Those flames moved as if they had their own will and relentlessly devoured the spirit.

---Was that really «Fireball» magic?

"....."

At last, with the final death cries of agony from the ice beast, the flames vanished.

"Haaa, haaa, haaa....."

Claire had exhausted her strength from firing those flames and fell to her knees.

".....Y, you can use that kind of amazing magic?"

Rinslet asked as she pressed down on her clotting flank.

"Y, yeah.....but, father said to never use it.....kuu....."

"Your hands are!?"

Rinslet gasped.

.....Claire's hands were severely burnt.

"I, I'm fine, this much....."

With her face distorting from pain, Claire put on a smile to act strong.

Rinslet sighed.

".....I swear. Even though you're a crybaby, you're rash."

"....."

There was no response. Whether she'd used up her vitality or divine power, Claire had lost her consciousness as if having fallen asleep.

Rinslet gently touched her cheek and,

"Claire Elstein---"

Softly whispered that.

"I will recognize you as my destined rival."



"This was my first meeting with her---"

Rinslet finished the story and quietly put down her tea cup.

"After that, we were rescued by our fathers who realized something strange was going on, but Claire and I were really frightened."

".....I see. Well, it's a relief you two were safe."

Kamito felt relieved.

"At any rate, as expected, isn't Claire's personality too different?"

"Yes, that child changed four years ago after the incident with Rubia-sama. She closed her heart to everyone and set herself on only becoming stronger."

"....."

But --- and Rinslet continued on.

"Lately, it seems that she has opened her heart again. ---That's right, ever since she met with Kamito-san."

"Come to think of it, when we met, she tried to make me her slave."

Kamito smiled wryly to hide his embarrassment and,

"---Thanks for the meal. I should get back to my room soon."

He stood from his seat.

.....Listening to the story had taken quite a bit of time.

A boy staying in a girl's room any longer would be a breach of manners.

".....Th, that's true. Even though it's fine if you stay a little longer."

Rinslet muttered as if it was a pity.

---And at the time. The sound of knocking on the door.

".....Yes?"

"Rinslet, I, I---"

"Claire?"

Rinslet opened the door and the one standing there was Claire who had a small box in her hands.

"What is it?"

".....Umm, snacks, I bought too many yesterday, so do you want some?"

As she averted her eyes, Claire brought the box in her hands out front.

.....It looks like a chance to fix their friendship.

Rinslet seemed to understand her intentions.

"Oh my, it matches well since I was just making tea."

"Ah, is that so.....eh?"

In an instant, Claire's face that peeked into the room stiffened.

"Yo, Claire---"

"Wh, what.....have you two been alone until now?"

"Yes. We ate breakfast together."

".....Hm, hmph, I see. Alone with Kamito."

Claire's expression was quickly degenerating into one of displeasure.

"K, Kamito is mine, so please don't just feed him as you like!"

"Oh my, Kamito-san isn't yours; he's mine."

Sparks were flying between the two at the entrance.

While he watched the state of those two---

(.....Somehow, it seems like another fight has started.)

Kamito sighed, exasperated.

Chapter Four

Date with Dragon

Dawn. In a plain away from the castle the representatives were lodging at---

A black-haired girl with her hand raised towards the darkness was there.

"Crush the universal light, O spirit of the evil black dragon---"

The radiance of divine power that shot into the surroundings indicated the magnitude of the spirit being summoned.

"Thou shalt abide my command and eliminate my enemies!"

The moment the icy cry echoed into the the dark's stillness.

Oooooooooon!

Tearing through the night, a pitch black dragon manifested from thin air.

Dragon spirit «Nidhogg» --- the celebrated highest-class dragon spirit of Dracunia.

The atmosphere shook from the enormous dragon spirit's roar and---

A red blast of light was fired.

Gouged out from the ground with a deafening sound, earth and sand became lava which danced in the air.

After the flash cleared---

The field ahead had been incinerated away in a straight line.

Comparable to even a tactical-class military spirit, it was a frighteningly destructive power.

However, the girl's gaze that looked upon the destruction's vestiges remained stern.

.....Somehow, she didn't seem satisfied.

"As I thought, I can't concentrate....."

The girl --- captain of the Dragon Knights, Leonora Lancaster, sighed heavily.

.....She couldn't return to normal.

She had been in a slump the entire time during the «Blade Dance».

Being able to advance to the finals was thanks to the cooperation of her teammates and the height of her true strength, but as expected, winning would be difficult if she were to remain like this. This «Blade Dance» wasn't so low-grade that she could achieve victory without being in her best condition.

It wasn't that her skill had degraded. The flow of divine power surrounding her was also regular.

But ever since **that day**, something had been off.

Yes, that male spirit contractor --- since the day she had crossed blades with Kaze haya Kamito.

".....!"

The instant his face surfaced in her mind, her face grew hot.

It became hard to breathe and her heart was pounding fiercely.

It resembled the stimulation when the «Dragon Blood» rampaged but was slightly different.

(Just what exactly is this, I wonder.....)

This bad condition that had carried on for several days was without a doubt related to that man.

In that case---

"---I knew it; there's no other way but to confirm it."

.....What she thought of was a method befitting a girl from the country of dragons, a direct resolution.



After having eaten breakfast in Rinslet's room, Kamito lay atop the bed in his own room.

.....It was the greatest happiness for a person. Sleeping for the second time, that is.

".....Now then, how shall I pass the evening."

He looked at the clock and saw it was still morning.

If he were to get into bed just like this, there would even be a third time but---

".....But that would really be a waste."

And he corrected his thinking.

At any rate, every country in the continent had set up many extravagant entertainment facilities for the «Blade Dance». He fully intended to enjoy them.

"I should also invite Claire and the others---"

Thinking that, he stood from the bed and,

".....Hm?"

There was something squirming in the bed.

Could this be---

"Est!?"

He pulled the sheets aside and,

"....."

As he had predicted, the one concealed there was a sword spirit with silvery white hair.

"Kamito, good morning."

Est gazed expressionlessly at Kamito with her mysterious violet eyes.

"Est, don't just enter my bed whenever --- hey, what's with that get-up!?"

In the middle of his words, Kamito widened his eyes.

.....Est was not in her usual naked knee socks attire.

It was an extremely rare occurrence for this sword spirit to cover her body with clothes.

A foreign design that had a red line against a white background. Her collarbone peeked out and her skin that could be seen from the slit was strangely captivating.

.....No matter where he looked, it resembled the clothes that Ren Ashbell had worn during the «Blade Dance» three years ago.

"Yes, Kamito. This is the maiden costume from tofu's country."

Est answered as she pulled her fingers out from the outfit's oversized sleeves.

.....That action was somehow lovely.

".....Could you mean the place where I was born when you say tofu's country?"

That meant the far eastern island country that Kamito had been before being taken to the «Instructional School».

Kamito had no memories of that time for the most part but---

"Yes. Do you like the maiden costumes from your home?"

Est tilted her head and let the sleeves fall onto the bed.

At that moment, the shoulder portion loosened and revealed the underlying collarbone.

Kamito's face reddened and he hurriedly averted his eyes.

".....Kamito?"

"Y, yeah, it's really cute....."

Gulping, he finally managed to voice that.

"Fua, Kamito....."

The ever-expressionless Est looked a little happy.

Truthfully, he should be scolding her for entering his bed as she pleased, but she had taken the trouble to wear his birthplace's clothes.

.....Thinking of that, he couldn't get angry.

"Kamito, I really like you.....kiss ♪ "

".....!?"

Est, whose maiden costume had gently fallen off, kissed Kamito's cheek.

Snow-like white skin. Her modest chest intermittently entered his vision.

"E, Est, don't remove your clothes!"

".....Why?"

The sword spirit tilted her head in wonder.

"Th, that is....."

Just as Kamito was troubled.

Craaaaaack!

All of a sudden, the room's window was shattered.

".....Wh, what!?"

The surprised Kamito turned around.

And.

".....Uwah!"

.....A large dragon was outside the window.

A red dragon flapping its enormous wings.

"Th, thth, this pervert, just what are you making an innocent spirit girl do!"

The girl riding on its back glared sharply at Kamito.

It was a girl he knew.

(If I remember, she's the vice-captain of the «Knights of the Dragon Emperor», Yuri El Cid!?)

"Phew....."

The dragon knight girl --- Yuri snorted as though displeased and jumped into the room.

"Wh, what is it, you, what do you want!?"

Kamito yelled as he shielded Est behind him.

(.....Don't tell me, it's an attack?)

But he didn't think those famous «Knights of the Dragon Emperor» would use such means.

"Kuu, why is Leonora-sama, with this kind of pervert....."

Yuri muttered as she flailed her hair around.

"What about Leonora?"

Kamito asked with suspicion but,

"Hmph, I only came to deliver this to you. Confirm the rest yourself."

Saying that, Yuri took out a sheet of paper from a pocket of her military uniform and threw it onto the table.

It wasn't just a sheet of paper. The abstract image of a dragon --- it was sealed with Dracunia's crest which was essential for foreign diplomatic documents.

"H, hey, what does this mean?"

"I have properly delivered it, brutish Ordesian pervert of a demon king!"

There was completely no chance to stop her.

The dragon knight spun on her heel and jumped back onto the red dragon flying outside the window.

".....Just what was that?"

Kamito muttered, dumbfounded, as he watched the dragon flying away in the distance.

Opening the paper atop the table, he found methodically written letters.

"Wait at «Saint Areishia Plaza» at two in the evening --- huh."

Kamito pondered it for a little while and,

".....Don't tell me, a challenge for a duel?"

His previous blade dance with Leonora had ended in an inconclusive draw. And that was done under the special circumstances of Kamito having lost Est while Leonora ran wild from her «Dragon Blood».

He could understand her desire for a proper rematch.

But if her motive was a battle, it was strange that she would suggest such a crowded place for the meeting point.

(.....Anyway, aren't we going to fight in tomorrow's finals already?)

He just couldn't read Leonora's thoughts.

Considering her personality, it wasn't a trap.

Kamito looked at the clock mounted on the wall.

There was still around an hour before the appointed time.

"Well, I'll understand if I go....."

He put the letter in his pocket and turned towards Est.

"Est, I'll be going out for a bit."

"Kamito, you won't play with me?"

"Sorry. I'll be back before dusk."

".....Understood. Kamito."

He put his hands together and apologized and Est nodded.

"Now then, it'd be nice if we're just meeting to talk but....."



".....Hm, was that Kamito?"

In front of the gate to the castle that «Team Scarlet» was staying at.

Ellis, who had returned from reporting to the Fahrengart house, had discovered Kamito leaving.

She did not see Claire or Est nearby. It seemed he was alone.

(.....Th, this is a chance!)

With her heart thumping, she took a breath to call out but,

(.....No, wait.)

She closed her mouth as she changed her mind.

.....He seemed a bit different than usual.

If he were going to the city to have fun, he would have undoubtedly invited Claire and the others. She didn't think he had business that required him to go out alone.

(Suspicious.....)

Her intuition from normally working as a public morals officer was informing her.

Perhaps he was going to the city to partake in indecent entertainment?

(.....I don't think that would happen, but there is a need to confirm it.)

Ellis erased the sound of her footsteps with wind spirit magic and stealthily began shadowing Kamito.



And with that---

A little before the appointed time, Kamito arrived at «Saint Areishia Plaza».

He searched for Leonora in front of the statue of the Holy Maiden Areishia at the center, but couldn't find her.

As he stood there reluctantly, he could hear various rumors being whispered around him.

"Look, it's the Lewd King. I wonder what he's doing here?" "He's definitely looking for girls to make into his slaves." "How repulsive....." "Don't make eye contact with him. He'll impregnate you." "It would be great if he were punished by Ren Ashbell-sama."

The cold glares of the girls passing through the plaza pierced him.

(.....I somehow feel like dying now.)

Kamito stood there with the incessant desire to escape and the small hand of the clock tower struck two.

And exactly at that moment---

"---I've kept you waiting. Kazehaya Kamito."

A dignified and serene voice reached him.

".....Leonora!?"

Kamito gulped without thinking when he looked at the appearance of the girl that had appeared behind him.

She was not donning the military uniform of the Knights of the Dragon Emperor.

A white dress with a small purse slung over her shoulder.

Her trademark beret had also changed into a style hat. The dragon embroidery was quite lovely.

(Um, battle gear.....there's no way it is.)

Kamito looked on in fascination and,

".....Kazehaya Kamito."

Leonora opened her mouth.

"D, don't you have anything to say?"

"Y, yeah....."

Kamito returned to reality and nodded hurriedly.

"Umm, it's not your usual military uniform."

"Yes."

"....."

"Anything else?"

".....Well, it suits you really well. More like, it's way too cute."

".....!?"

Leonora's face turned beet red in an instant.

"Wh, whwh, what you saying, you pervert!"

"What!"

Even though he'd finally complimented her, she was unexpectedly calling him a pervert.

".....A, as I thought, **the cause of my heart's turmoil is without a doubt you!**"

With a red face, she glared bitterly at Kamito.

.....He didn't understand what was going on.

At any rate---

"Why did you call me out?"

Kamito asked straight out.

"That's....."

Doing so, Leonora had a perplexed face for a moment, then,

"T, to have you take responsibility!"

She turned to Kamito and thrust her finger at him.

".....Hah?"

Kamito tilted his head.

".....What do you mean responsibility?"

"I, it's your fault I can't draw out my true power."

Leonora leered at Kamito reproachfully.

".....My fault?"

Kamito was becoming increasingly puzzled.



No, truly---

Kamito had shattered her Elemental Waffe, the «Dragon Slayer».

Though she, being a noble knight, didn't seem the type to resent him unjustly.

As though understanding Kamito's inner thoughts, Leonora shook her head.

"No. My «Dragon Slayer» has sufficiently recovered. It's just---"

She pressed her lips tightly together and,

"I, I don't know why, but whenever I think of you, my heart beats madly. Even at the height of battle, when your face crosses my mind, my skills dull."

Leonora's voice was slightly shaky.

(I see.....)

Kamito somehow understood.

.....Losing to Kamito must have been greatly frustrating.

She had probably lost her composure as a result of losing to Kamito and thus her skills had dulled --- is what Kamito surmised.

(.....And so as I thought, we're going to fight again?)

If she won against Kamito fair-and-square right now, she would regain her confidence --- he wondered if that was it.

However---

"Th, that's why!"

As Leonora's face reddened again, she thrust her finger out at Kamito and---

"I'll have you accompany me for the entire day!"

".....Hah?"

Those completely unexpected words were voiced.



"Wh, whwh, wha.....!"

Ellis, who was watching over Kamito from the shadows, was gaping.

"Why is Leonora-dono.....!"

Kamito and Leonora seemed to be having fun talking at the center of the plaza.

Moreover, Leonora wasn't wearing her usual military uniform, instead donning adorable clothes that charmed even Ellis despite them being both girls.

.....Looking at the situation, it was unquestionably a date.

No, Ellis had no idea what a real date was like, but a long time ago, she had read one of the books that had been confiscated from Claire under the knights' authority.

"C, curses, Kamito, you've even laid your hands on the enemy leader.....!"

She bit her lips together as her shoulders rose.

She had acknowledged that Kamito was an airhead demon lord that couldn't be helped, but she didn't think his integrity was this low.

"I, it can't be forgiven.....!"

Having made up her mind, Ellis burst out of the shadows.

However---

".....Hm, wh, where did they go?"

At some point in time, their figures had melded into the crowd.



---Meanwhile. Another person happened to be present.

".....Haa, how tiring."

Gorgeous black hair that fell to her hips. Pale dark eyes.

The second princess of the empire, Fianna Ray Ordesia.

Last night, she had stayed at the hotel of the highest class, «Royal Palace», and informed the emperor of their advancement into the finals.

.....She normally kept a calm and composed attitude before her teammates, but right now, she was in an extremely bad mood. Terribly unpleasant memories came to mind when she delivered her report.

Ordesia's emperor, as well as the high-ranking nobles, had welcomed her with superficial courtesy. However, that was only because the empire was reaping huge benefits from their representatives' victory in the «Blade Dance».

Four years ago, when Fianna became the «Lost Queen», they had taken such a cold stance with her who was still so young---

That harsh treatment back then had left scars that remained to this day.

They continued to look down on Fianna who had been expelled from the «Divine Ritual Institute».

(Well, I don't really care about that.....)

The reason she had such a grim expression wasn't that.

She had checked out early this morning and visited the «Biblion» to search for books connected to a certain issue.

The words that Sjora Kahn had revealed when she held Fianna captive.

---Information pertaining to the «Darkness Spirit King».

The Darkness Spirit King --- Ren Ashdoll.

According to the books she had investigated, a portion of the Alphas Theocracy believed that to be the name of the sixth «Spirit King».

(Sjora said that Kamito was the «Darkness Spirit King»'s reincarnation.)

If that was true, then she wondered just what the «Darkness Queen» was.

Moreover---

(The other Ren Ashbell --- Rubia-sama also seemed fixated on Kamito-kun.)

.....She really wondered just what was happening around Kamito.

At any rate, there was no doubt that something was squirming behind this «Blade Dance».

(Kamito-kun.....)

Her worries were endless. She had considered discussing this with her teammates, but then she would need to tell Claire about Rubia.

If she knew the truth, she might not be able to handle it.

(I can't speak about this yet.....)

And.

When she sighed heavily.

".....Kamito-kun?"

She discovered Kamito amidst the crowd.

(.....What is he doing here, I wonder?)

Kamito seemed to be waiting for somebody in front of the statue of the Holy Maiden Areishia.

(.....But just who is it?)

If it was someone from their team, there was no need to wait here.

With doubts filling her mind, while she was taking a step and about to call out to him,

".....!?"

Fianna's motions came to a halt.

An adorably dressed girl had appeared in front of Kamito.

(.....Leonora Lancaster from the «Knights of the Dragon Emperor»!?)

Fianna tilted her head.

(.....Why would Kamito-kun be meeting with the enemy team's ace?)

The question swirled around in her head.

While that was happening---

The two exchanged some words and disappeared towards the main road.

"....."

Fianna was glued to that spot for a few seconds.

.....In order to comprehend what she had just seen.

And then---

"Fu, fufu, fu.....is that how it is."

Her expression slightly stiffened.

"Even though I'm here worrying about Kamito-kun, as usual, he's off being the Demon King of the Noon."

Her pale dark eyes became devoid of emotion and a black aura enveloped her body.

That appearance was just like the «Darkness Queen».

And then.

"Y, Your Highness?"

That came from behind her.

".....Ellis?"

Turning around, the knight captain stood there.

"Your Highness, what are you doing at this kind of place?"

"You as well; why are you here?"

"Mm, th, that's....."

Fianna returned the question and Ellis' face turned red as she attempted to mislead her.

It was rare for her who was ever-composed.

(.....I get it.)

The wise Fianna immediately understood the reason for her conduct.

She had probably also discovered Kamito in the crowd. And then she had no doubt followed them.

(.....What to do.)

To Fianna, Ellis was also a strong rival in love.

Actually, in a certain sense, she may be the strongest contender of the group.

(.....But right now, we have to unite.)

After troubling over it, Fianna came to that conclusion.

At any rate, the threat that Leonora posed in that respect was unknown.

"Say, that was Kamito just now, wasn't it?"

".....Y, yeah, it seems that way."

Maybe because she was uncomfortable about having followed him, Ellis seemed to be trying even harder to fool her.

"You were following Kamito-kun, right? I'll also come with you."

".....Your Highness?"

"Come on, come on, it's too late once Kamito-kun becomes the Demon King of the Noon."

"Mm, th, that's true. I'm worried about Leonora-dono's safety."

Ellis cleared her throat and nodded.

The two who had come to a mutual understanding ran in search of the two who had disappeared into the crowd.



"....."

The people they passed turned suspicious glances upon them.

It was completely natural. He was with the ace of a team that would also be attending the finals, after all.

(This has somehow become quite odd.....)

Walking alongside Leonora, Kamito scratched his head.

(.....I don't really get how I'm the cause of her slump either.)

In the first place, a spirit contractor's ability was greatly affected by irregularities in their mind and body.

A slightly wounded heart could prevent one from summoning their spirit, and conversely, if one's mind were strengthened, his or her power could rise explosively. Therefore, the attitude Leonora was taking towards Kamito, who she thought was the cause, was a little inexplicable.

At any rate, he felt that he should be thankful she had not called him out for a duel.

(.....This is a date, isn't it.)

Furthermore, his partner was an extraordinarily cute, beautiful girl.

Realizing that, Kamito cleared his throat.

"So, doing things together is fine, but do you have any ideas on where to go?"

"Ideas?"

Leonora put a hand to her chin and pondered.

"I didn't think about that. I don't mind where we go if I'm with you."

"Th, that way of talking will invite misunderstandings."

The blushing Kamito took out a sheet of paper from his uniform's pocket.

It was a pamphlet with the business district's shop locations, details and other information.

"They've taken the effort to have these entertainment centers, so would you like to go to one?"

"Hrm, it was a good idea to leave it to you."

Leonora nodded and moved to peek at the pamphlet.

".....!"

Kamito's heartbeat quickened at the fragrance of shampoo that tickled his nose.

Her slender fingertips traced the map and stopped at a certain point.

"I would like to try going here."

"The «Blade Dance» Memorial Hall?"

It was a pavilion financed by the «Divine Ritual Institute». Historical documents related to the «Blade Dance» were supposed to be on display there.

"It's a fairly safe choice for a date."

Kamito suddenly revealed those thoughts and,

".....Da, dada, date!?"

"Ah, no---"

"Wh, what are you misunderstanding, you perverted brute of a demon king!"

Leonora was angry with a bright red face.

.....Her intensity was such that it felt like she would draw her «Dragon Slayer» at any time.

"S, sorry, it's not a date, yeah!"

"Hmph, of course, I wouldn't engage in that kind of slovenly act!"

She averted her eyes from Kamito and scurried away.

.....Kamito shrugged helplessly.



The «Blade Dance» Memorial Hall was at a quiet place far from the center of the business district.

The building's exterior resembled a shrine.

Perhaps because the pavilion lacked entertainment, there were few tourists.

Suspicious stares turned upon them as soon as they entered the building but, as expected, nobody called out to them. Carelessly calling

out to the «Blade Dance» representatives would be a violation of manners amongst the nobles.

They walked along the indicated path and viewed the display items. On the corridor's wall was a commentary for formerly used tactics and portraits of the successive generations of winners.

"As expected, there are pretty much no documents from long ago."

"Yes, especially those from before the Ranbal War. The «Divine Ritual Institute»'s library was also burned down in that war."

Leonora who was walking beside him pushed her glasses up as she nodded.

".....Huh? When did you put those on?"

"I, is it that strange that I'm wearing glasses?"

Leonora glared at Kamito with a sullen look.

Come to think of it, she had also been wearing glasses when they met at the «Biblion».

If he remembered correctly, she only wore them when reading thin letters.

"Ah, no, glasses also suit you really well."

Kamito voiced his honest thoughts. The regular Leonora was also beautiful, but she had an adult-like charm when wearing glasses that made his heart race.

He did that and---

".....Wh, what are you saying, you pervert with a glasses fetish!"

Leonora quickly walked away with a beet-red face.

"Why....."

Kamito sighed.

---And he turned his gaze to a certain name engraved in the wall.

The winner of the «Blade Dance» twenty four years ago.

The «Dusk Witch» --- Greyworth Ciel Mais.

"....."

Kamito stood still and stared at the portrait displayed there.

When she was young --- though she was still young --- anyway, it was a portrait of her when she was fifteen.

She still had her characteristic ash blonde hair, but she was drawn quite innocent and lovely.

Kamito had seen her when she reverted to her young state, but it had only lasted momentarily, so the memories hadn't really stuck with him at all.

(.....So that witch was also young before.)

Kamito did not know the «Dusk Witch»'s strength in her prime.

It felt somehow strange.

"Kamito, what are you doing?"

Being called by Leonora, Kamito hurried after her.

Further along the path they were walking on, a large room was shrouded behind a curtain.

".....Special Display Room?"

Kamito took a step in,

"Guah....."

A groan surfaced from deep within him.

(I, I was careless.....!)

The first thing that leaped into his vision was---

A tapestry with **the previous Blade Dance's winner's figure sewn onto it.**

Glossy black hair that fell to her waist. Foreign white clothing.

And that pitch black sword in her hand was surely --- the darkness elemental waffe, «Vorpall Sword».

There wasn't just a tapestry. There was a portrait covering an entire wall, and to add to that, a life-sized bronze statue was stationed in the center of the room.

"Wh, what is this room!?"

Kamito's face stiffened and,

"Having a special display room constructed is a matter of course. Even amongst the past champions, she is overwhelmingly famous."

Leonora's eyes were lit up as she was captivated by the wall portrait.

"Her blade dance is my distant goal. ---Stronger than anything, and noble as well."

.....There was no way she could even dream that the person in question was standing right beside her.

"....."

Kamito also returned to staring at the tapestry depicting his past appearance.

(My strength still hasn't recovered to what I had back then.....)

He was certainly in the process of recovering his strength from his prime.

He had also become able to use Greyworth's absolute blade arts, despite the burden they placed on his body.

But he still couldn't reach her. There was an absolute wall between him and her.

"Kamito?"

".....Mm, yeah, sorry."

Kamito returned to reality after Leonora called out to him.

"We'd also like to perform a blade dance that will make history in the finals."

"Yeah, that's right."

Kamito nodded firmly in response to the smiling Leonora who had removed her glasses.

---After that, just when they were exiting the memorial hall, Leonora pointed ahead.

"Kamito, they're selling bread there."

"Yeah?"

He looked to where she was pointing and, sure enough, there was a bread stall there.

The fresh bread lined up in a glass case was giving off a delicious scent.

"Ohh, those look good. Maybe I'll buy one.....wha!?"

Having neared the glass case, Kamito was rendered speechless.

What was lined up there was---

For some reason, a large amount of «Ren Ashbell» bread.

Upon the fluffy baked bread was a design done with chocolate that looked exactly like his «Spirit Seal».

"Wh, what is this; I never approved this!"

".....Approved?"

"Ah, no....."

Kamito hurriedly fooled her.

"This is good. Let's buy some as a souvenir for Yuri and the others."

"So you're buying it....."

Kamito sighed in blank amazement.



".....Nom. This tastes pretty good."

"Yeah, the taste is decent."

Kamito and Leonora ate the bread they had just bought as they walked down the business district beside each other.

The bread had chocolate on it, but this chocolate was designed to look like the «Darkness Demonic Sword» and was unexpectedly detailed.

".....I don't think Restia expected to become a decoration for bread either."

"Kamito, did you say something?"

"No, nothing.....hm."

Kamito shifted his eyes to Leonora's mouth.

"You have chocolate stuck to your face."

"Eh?"

With a wry smile, Kamito wiped off the chocolate with his finger and,

"Fuua.....wh, whwh, what are you doing, you pervert!"

Leonora cried out with a bright red face.....just like Claire's reaction yesterday.

"Dracunia's strongest knight also has her cute points."

".....~!"

With Kamito's teasing, her face grew increasingly red and,

"A, as I thought, you're the reason my heart is in turmoil!"

And she turned her face away.

"Sorry, my bad. So where should we go next?"

".....That's right. I heard a weapons museum and spirits museum were on the outskirts of town."

"Such refined tastes as always."

Kamito voiced that kind of thought and,

".....Sorry. I was raised in a strict knight household, so I don't know where best to go in these situations."

".....I see."

Well, that was similar to Kamito. He didn't know a tactful place to have fun or things of that sort.

"Then let's just wander around and explore the business district."

"Yes."

At that time, a wind spirit like a small bird flew away above them.

A sudden strong gust of wind blew through the path and Leonora's one-piece was turned up before Kamito's eyes.

"Kyaa!"

".....!?"

Kamito reflexively averted his eyes but---

(.....Hm?)

He had a slightly bad feeling about the image that was burned into his eyes for but a moment.

He had not seen a single stitch of the panties that logically should have been there.

What he saw in its place was a soft-looking butt---

(.....N, no way!?)

Come to think of it --- Kamito recalled.

About what happened at the library before the battle portion. When Leonora who was being controlled by her «Dragon Blood» tempted Kamito, he was sure that she---

".....Umm, could I ask one crude question?"

"What is it?"

"Are you not.....wearing u, underwear?"

".....?"

Leonora tilted her head, puzzled for a moment, then---

"Yes. Princess maidens that serve a dragon may not wear underwear."

She said it like it was extremely obvious with a nod.

".....Are you a naked knee socks sword spirit."

Kamito made a small sigh and,

"Let's go buy underwear first. We'll continue after that."



On the other hand---

".....Kuu, curses, Kamito, where did you go?"

Ellis and Fianna ran around the business district as they used wind spirits to gather information.

As expected, searching for two people in this kind of crowd was difficult.

"Perhaps they have entered a building?"

Fianna said while short of breath.

"Really though, we can't just use spirits to infiltrate shops."

---And then. A spirit like a small bird alighted on Ellis' shoulder.

".....What? You saw the two?"

"Where did they go?"

The wind spirit whispered something into Ellis' ear.

"Ka, Kamito peeked under Leonora-dono's skirt in public!?"

Twitch.

In an instant, Fianna's expression had frozen over.

"Fu, fufu, fu, I w, wonder what Kamito-kun could possibly thinking, fufufu....."

".....Y, Your Highness, you're leaking some kind of black aura."

Ellis gulped.

"Let's go, Ellis. They might still be nearby!"

"Yeah, we can't permit any more shameless acts!"

The two exchanged nods and ran off.



".....D, do I really have to go too?"

In front of an underwear store that catered to the nobility's daughters, Kamito awkwardly scratched his head.

If he was seen entering this kind of store, another disgraceful rumor would start.

.....Rather, he was already suffering cold looks from the girls in the store.

"I have not worn underwear before. Thus, I do not know which underwear is best."

"I don't know that kind of thing either."

"Then it doesn't matter if I continue not wearing any underwear?"

".....Kuu, what kind of threat is this."

Kamito groaned deeply.

That's right, she wasn't wearing anything under that one-piece.

If the wind blew again and her skirt flew up---

Kamito bringing around a girl without underwear was quite capable of starting the worst rumor yet.

(.....I absolutely must avoid that.)

Kamito finally gave in and step foot into the underwear store.

---Several minutes later. Kamito stood in the shop for the sake of picking out underwear for Leonora.

".....As I thought, it's unsettling. Underwear, that is."

Leonora groaned with a troubled face.

She had bought a high-quality silk set to try out, but it seemed to feel awkward so the Dragon Princess Maiden wasn't pleased.

"Won't you get used to it? Anyway, please wear it, at least when walking in town."

".....It's somehow very tight."

Leonora complained with dissatisfaction on her face.

"At the very least, couldn't I wear this?"

And she spread out laced black underwear with both hands.

"D, don't spread out that kind of thing....."

Kamito reddened as he averted his eyes,

"Rather, isn't something different between that and the one you're wearing?"

"Yes. It seems this is the type with a hole here."

".....!?"

Looking closely, there was a neat cut at a vital location.

"Wh, why was that kind of thing being sold!"

"Is it not okay?"

"It's not. In a certain sense, it's worse than not wearing any."

Kamito decisively shook his head.

.....Rather, he wondered why he was choosing underwear for the enemy team's ace.

"Then how about this?"

"That's practically a string!Why are you deliberately choosing ones with high exposure!"

"I can't calm down with lots of cloth."

"Normally people can't calm down without wearing underwear."

Kamito groaned while pressing down on his forehead.

".....Th, then, how about this?"

Leonora was holding a tropical-style set with southern sea flowers drawn on it.

".....It's the type that doubles as a swimsuit. Isn't that pretty good?"

"Yes. It suits my tastes because the material is slippery and feels familiar to my skin."

".....I see, so it was just because you don't like the feeling of silk."

Amongst the underwear of the princess maidens that needed to frequently purify themselves, swimsuits and other multipurpose ones were numerous. It seemed that the smooth material of the swimsuit had also appealed to her.

"Well then, let's take this one---"

And Leonora took it in her hands---

"....."

And something turned towards Kamito like a flash.

"What's wrong?"

"No, s, since you've finally bought a swimsuit---"

With a slight tinge of red on his cheeks and upturned eyes, he opened his mouth.

---Why don't we go to the pool, he said.



And like that. The two left the central part of town and arrived at a pool in the forest.

Even if it was called a pool, it wasn't something made by human hands. It was something that utilized the already present large lake, so the impression was close to that of a beach along the sea.

Kamito who had changed into a tanktop swimsuit just before sat at the edge of the lake waiting for Leonora.

Many girls in swimsuits were frolicking along the lake shore, crying out in sweet voices.

But the instant they noticed Kamito,

"Kyaa, the Lewd King, the Lewd King is here!" "He's looking here, how scary....." "What an unpleasant gaze." "Don't come near my Lady!"

They successively jumped into lake and swam off to the far edge.

".....Am I a shark or something?"

The wounded Kamito hung his head on the empty lake edge.

And at that time.

"I, I've kept you waiting, Kamito."

".....!?"

Turning towards the voice that came from behind, he saw Leonora standing there with her hands on her hips.

Her youthful skin was tinged slightly red. Her chest seemed to burst out.

Her adorable butt wrapped in the flower-patterned swimsuit.

Her slender, beautiful legs were dazzling.

Kamito gulped at her outstanding proportions.

"U, umm, is it strange?"

Leonora rubbed her thighs together bashfully.

Kamito finally returned to his senses and,

"N, no, rather, well.....you're beautiful."

".....Wha, th, this pervert! Pervert!"

Leonora's admonishing voice instantly assaulted him.

"Why the heck! I just said my honest thoughts."

"Sh, shut up! Don't stare so much at a princess maiden's skin!"

Leonora quickly covered her chest and,

"I, I'll go swim a bit!"

In order to cool her body that was burning up from shyness, she jumped into the lake with vigor.

".....Oh boy."

Kamito sighed as he stared absentmindedly at Leonora who had left to swim.

Her swimming figure was also beautiful. It was almost like a dragon relaxedly flying about in the sky.

.....At any rate, would doing this really clear up what the cause of her slump was?

(Though looking from an outsider's point of view, she doesn't appear to be in a slump.....)

Honestly, if he were just considering victory, having her remain in a slump would be undoubtedly more advantageous.

But in that case, Kamito also couldn't be understood.

The promise he had made that one time.

---That he would fight with her when she was not being controlled by her «Dragon Blood».

"....."

He stood at the lake edge charmed by Leonora's swimming figure for a while and---

"Hmm---.....onii-sama, you perv."

"Wha!?"

Kamito hurriedly turned around upon hearing the familiar voice.

".....Mi, Mireille!?"

The one glaring at Kamito was Rinslet's lovely little sister.

Her platinum blonde hair clung to her wet skin.

She was clad in a white swimsuit and had a large swim tube around her waist.

"Wh, why are you here?"

"Since my morning lessons are over, I came to play."

"Did you come alone?"

"No, Milla came as well."

Mireille replied coldly.

And.

"Kamito, have you laid your hands on that Leonora Lancaster as well?"

Milla Bassett glared at Kamito with fruit juice in her hand.

She was wearing a swimsuit that had frills like a maid costume.

Her slightly wavy hair was tied on both ends of her head.

"Wa, wait a second, you're misunderstanding this! There's a reason for this....."

"What reason?"

"No matter how you look, it's a date. Even though onii-sama already has onee-sama."

"---I, it's nothing like a date!"

And Leonora, who had been swimming, hurriedly came to the shore.

"Mu....." ".....They're big."

Her large, wet chest covered with her tropical swimsuit.



The nine year old and thirteen year old combination gasped at the proportions which were the opposite of theirs.

"Kamito is assisting me in restoring my original condition. That's why it's definitely nothing like a date or some indecent activity!"

"Mu---..."

Mireille glared at Leonora with an expression like she couldn't agree.

.....Well, it was obvious since she was the enemy her esteemed older sister would be facing in the finals.

Kamito shrugged and turned towards Leonora.

"Well, did you figure it out? The cause of your slump."

".....No. But I feel like I will with a little more."

"I see. Well, take your time to think about it."

".....You can't say that. The finals begin tomorrow."

She shook her head and looked Kamito straight in the eye.

"As a knight and as an Elementalist --- I would like to blade dance with you in my best condition."

"....."

Kamito was silenced by her seriousness.

At that time, a large commotion rose on the shore.

".....What's that?"

"The «Water Spirit Festival» dedicated to this lake's spirits has begun."

Mireille explained to Kamito who tilted his head.

"Water Spirit Festival?"

"---A «Blade Dance» that imitates ancient water combat."

And this time, Milla explained.

The «Water Spirit Festival» seemed to be a type of ritualistic dance performance that imitated combat where two princess maidens formed a team. It wasn't flashy like a «Blade Dance», but a crowd of princess maidens wildly dancing was beautiful and it seemed to be quite popular as a spectator's sport.

"There's a prize prepared for the winning team, onii-sama."

A small shrine stood where Mireille was pointing with various goods like jewelry and magical tools lined up.

"It seems interesting. Maybe we should watch."

Kamito lowered himself onto the shore and,

Tug, tug.

"Hm?"

Leonora was tugging his arm.

"What is it?"

"No, well....."

Leonora seemed embarrassed as her cheeks flushed red and,

"Ka, Kamito, would you like to participate in that ritual?"

"Eh?"

Suddenly said that.

Her eyes were glued to the prizes lined up on the shrine.

"Could it be that you want something from those?"

".....Yes."

Leonora nodded.

"That is a product of the legendary doll craftsman, Lord Švankmajer. I didn't think I would see it at this kind of place."

Somehow, it seemed like she wanted that large dragon plushie.

"The second place prize.....all right!"

Kamito nodded and grabbed onto Leonora's arm.

"Wh, what are you doing!?"

"You want that plushie, right? Then let's go get it."

"I, is that okay!?"

"Yeah. If you and I pair up, nobody can compare."

"O, of course!"

Kamito gave her a thumbs up and Leonora nodded happily.

---At that time. In the forest nearby the lake, Ellis and Fianna who were out of breath were there.

"Kamito, w, we've finally caught up to you.....!"

"Fu, fufu.....coming to the pool with a girl, you can't make any excuses now."

The out of breath Ellis who was breathing hard and Fianna whose entire body was wrapped in a black aura.

"Mu, it seems like he's going to enter the lake with Leonora-dono."

"Do they intend to participate in the «Water Spirit Festival»? But why---"

And the line of prizes on the shrine entered the vision of Fianna who was tilting her head.

"That is.....!"



Her pale dark eyes widened.

The top-class prize adorning the top of the shrine. That was---

"Pair tickets for the «Royal Palace»?"

Even catering to those of the Ordesia royal family, it was the highest-class hotel on «Ragna Ys».

"Is Kamito aiming for that?"

"Yes, there's no doubt. To say nothing of a regular blade dance, if it's that ace combination of «Blade Dance» representatives, they're more than enough to aim for victory."

"But tomorrow are the finals. They don't have time for something like using a hotel voucher---"

"If it's used this evening, there's no problem. If so....."

Fianna took a breath.

"Since it's Kamito-kun, he might do the blade dance of the night with her."

"Wh, what did you say!"

.....Imagining God knows what, Ellis' face turned bright red.

"Th, that's not allowed! We absolutely must prevent it!"

"Yes, that's right!"

The two exchanged a firm handshake.



".....To put it shortly, it's like an underwater cavalry battle."

Kamito, who had Leonora piggybacking him, once again mentally went over the rules of the «Water Spirit Festival» that Milla Bassett had taught him.

First, the team of two spirit princesses consisted of a «Horse» and a «Knight». The princess maiden that became the «Horse» was responsible for movement and the knight riding them would carry a special gem at their chest --- it was a scramble for «Magic Stones». The team that gathered a large number of «Magic Stones» would be the winner.

It was obvious but wounding a princess maiden or defiling the lake were strictly forbidden.

On a side note, the princess maidens that served as the «Horse» were emitting divine power from their entire body to float. If it was a princess maiden with a certain amount of training, it was not a difficult technique at all.

So the ritual itself wasn't very dangerous but---

(It's dangerous in a different kind of way for me.....)

Squish.

The feeling of soft thighs upon his neck.

.....For an adolescent boy, having his heart rush was uncontrollable.

"Ka, Kamito, please don't move around so much.....ahnn!"

"S, sorry.....!"

Kamito's face turned red at the seductive voice that Leonora let out above him.

Soon, the other princess maiden knight-horse pairs entered the lake one after the other.

It seemed a lot of unexpected people were participating. They were undoubtedly aiming for the first-class prize of pair tickets to the «Royal Palace».

.....Rather, other than Kamito's team, there were probably no other teams aiming for the second-place dragon plushie.

"Leonora, can you do it?"

"Yes. I will definitely obtain that dragon!"

Leonora nodded with a voice full of conviction.

Participants of the «Blade Dance» taking part in a regular ritual like this felt a little immature, but well, they were aiming for second place, so it shouldn't draw any malice.

"I won't let you do that, onii-sama!"

".....Eh?"

The one who came before them was Mireille who was piggybacking Milla Bassett.

As if being pressed by her swimsuit, a «Magic Stone» was forced between her small chest.

"Don't tell me, you two are also participating?"

"That's right. For the sake of my passive onee-sama, I'll get those hotel tickets!"

Puffing her minute chest, Mireille made a declaration.

In response---

"---Sorry, but those tickets are ours."

A soft-spoken yet icy voice resounded across the lake.

".....!?"

Kamito's expression froze.

It was an extremely familiar voice. But this was her voice when she was angry.

".....Ellis!?"

He turned around and there was---

A ponytailed, beautiful girl wearing a bold swimsuit and,

".....Hmm, Kamito-kun's also good at taming dragons."

Her Highness glared at Kamito coldly while making bubbles on the water surface.

"Y, you two, why are you here?"

"Hmph, you should try thinking about that yourself, you insolent person!"

Ellis' reddish brown eyes were teary.

"W, we won't let Kamito-kun dance that blade dance of the night!"

"Wh, what the heck, a blade dance of the night.....!"

.....Being pushed by the ojou-samas that were angry for some reason, Kamito was being overwhelmed.

This time, Ellis focused her gaze on Leonora who was atop his shoulders.

"Leonora-dono, I respect you as a fellow knight. However, this Ellis Fahrengart will not allow such an insolent deed!"

"Wh, what kind of insolent deed are you talking about! I was just, with Kamito---"

"Talking is useless; if you're a knight, settle this with your blade!"

"Kamito-kun, prepare yourself."

"Wait a second, what do you mean!?"

The two left while ignoring the perplexed Kamito.

"They'll be strong enemies, those two."

"Y, yeah....."

And so, a whistle signaled the start of the «Water Spirit Festival».



"Let's go, Leonora!"

"Yes, the dragon god's blessings upon this battle!"

Leonora gave a gallant shout above him.

The ten-odd princess maiden horse and rider groups were clamoring.

Participating in this kind of rough ritual meant that these were undoubtedly trained princess maidens. From within them, he could even see those that had been eliminated in the real battle portion of the «Blade Dance» here and there.

(So Ellis and Fianna aren't going to challenge us yet.....)

Gathering a large amount of «Magic Stones» from those that looked easy to defeat in the first part and leaving the confrontation with Kamito and Leonora to the end was mostly likely their plan.

If those two were aiming for the «Royal Palace» hotel tickets, then there was no reason to battle with them, but those two seemed to have a different reason for their anger.

(.....There's no other way, huh.)

Kamito shrugged.

He had promised to accompany Leonora for the entire day.

Even if they were his precious comrades, he wouldn't go easy on them.

"Kamito, incoming!"

Immediately following the start, the swimsuit-clad princess maidens simultaneously faced them. In order to instantly crush Kamito and Leonora who held the largest battle strength, they had all temporarily allied.

That was what Kamito thought but---

"Everyone, kill the Lewd King!" "If you drown here, we can treat it as an accident!" "We won't leave any evidence behind." "A swift death to the enemy of women!"

.....He could hear various frightening lines.

"Kuu....."

"Kamito, what are you doing; we're being surrounded!"

The downhearted Kamito was rebuked by Leonora.

The sensation of thighs wrapped around his neck brought Kamito back to his senses.

".....Like I'll let you kill me before the finals!"

The advancing girls' enclosure.

In order to weave through that net, Kamito moved freely through the water.

Putting into practice the meta-3D movement that he had learned at «Instructional School» --- rather than the super high-speed «Shadow Weaving», this was the underwater movement technique called «Water Lily». It wasn't fast enough to make the opponent lose track of him, but those movements were like a water lily floating on the water's surface and provided no opportunity to capture him.

Just after Kamito easily escaped the net---

"Faa!?" "Hyann!" "Kyaaaaaaa!"

The girls' shrill cries echoed across the water.

In the moment they had passed by them, Leonora had stolen the «Magic Stones» at their bosom.

"As expected of you, Leonora."

"You as well; it almost feels like I'm riding a high-class dragon."

Leonora smiled while chuckling.

Her thighs pressed down on him and his heart rushed.

"Le, Leonora, please open your legs a bit more!"

".....Eh? Wh, what do you mean, you pervert!"

Hit, hit, hit, hit.

The red-faced, agitated Leonora began to hit Kamito's head.

"Wai, hold.....waa---"

When Kamito's balance fell apart uncontrollably---

"Their movements have stopped! If we're going to execute him, now's the time!"

The group of girls once again closed in.

"Leonora, calm down or things will get bad!"

".....!"

Leonora, who had finally snapped back to herself, smacked the girls nearing them from behind into the water and turned around to defend her chest from the countless outstretched hands.

"Are you okay!?"

"N, no problem, I'll show you the dance of a princess maiden in service of dragons!"

Leonora exhaled and silently readied both her hands.

Then---

She reached out with movements akin to a dance performance and stole the «Magic Stones» of the girls approaching them one-by-one.

".....Amazing."

It was just like a raging dragon.

"A single knight defeating scores of enemies is the specialty of Dracunia's knights. If I compare it with the the training I received as a young girl where I was thrown into a pack of fierce beasts, this is nothing."

Instantly beating down the surrounding riders, she obtained seven «Magic Stones».

Truly an ace out of the «Blade Dance» representatives. It was overwhelming strength that allowed none to approach.

"Now then, come, all who would like to challenge me!"

Leonora's dignified voice rang out.

And at that time.

".....!?"

A crackling noise accompanied the instant freezing of the water surrounding Kamito.

"Ice spirit magic!?"

In the moment Kamito's movements stopped, the figure of a rider approached.

"I've got you, onii-sama!"

It was the Milla Bassett and Mireille team.

"To think a nine year old can use this kind of spirit magic! As expected of Rinslet's little sister."

Kamito gave his honest admiration in light of that talent.

But the young Mireille could not snatch the «Magic Stone» from Leonora.

Just when he was thinking that---

"Kyaunn!"

A sweet cry was raised above Kamito's head.

".....!?"

".....Afuu.....ahnn.....!"

Leonora's thighs closed on Kamito with a squish.

"I, it hurts.....Leonora, wh, what are you doing!?"

"Fuaa.....th, this was an oversight; I can't move like this!"

".....Eh?"

Kamito somehow managed to twist his head and look up and,

(.....Damn it!)

---He finally realized their fatal mistake.

Leonora's chest had expanded!

That's right, since it was a battle done in swimsuits, there was no other place to store the «Magic Stones» stolen from the enemy other than at one's bosom. Consequently, if one gathered a certain amount of «Magic Stones», the rider would become unable to move.

If she did any intense movements right now, there was no doubt her swimsuit would break.

(.....They were waiting for us to gather «Magic Stones», huh.)

Kamito was astonished. The one who thought of this plan was probably the one giving Mireille a piggyback, Milla. She was truly the «Rupture Division»'s captain.

"Fufuu, your chest seems to be giving you trouble, dragon onee-sama!"

Mireille's fingers brushed against Leonora's chest which shook, spilling «Magic Stones».

"Fa.....nn, the «Magic Stones» are, from my breasts....."

Leonora's face was bright red as she shielded her chest with all her might.

The surrounding girls also thought of this as a chance and drew in.

".....Like I'll let you!"

Kamito cracked the ice covering the water with his fist and used all his power to escape. Several «Magic Stones» fell from Leonora's chest from the recoil, but they were unneeded in this situation.

"Haa, haa, nn....."

He could hear Leonora's troubled breathing above him.

"Are you okay?"

"Y, yes, somehow.....ahnn ♪"

As her chest rose and fell, the tips of the «Magic Stones» stimulated her sensitive breasts. She somehow suppressed her voice and endured it.

That lovable action made Kamito's heart race.

---At some point in time, the net with Mireille at the center had been completed.

".....So this is the end, huh."

Kamito groaned.

This was not the «Blade Dance». It was just some entertainment. Even if they were to lose, they wouldn't suffer a loss of honor, not that Kamito cared much for honor.

However---

(.....I've made a promise.)

That he would obtain that dragon plushie for Leonora.

Wanting to see the smile of a girl was the nature of a boy.

"Leonora---"

And Kamito spoke quietly.

"Hold on to me tightly and hold your breath."

"Wh, what do you intend to do?"

"It's okay. Believe in me."

".....!"

Leonora gasped overhead when Kamito ended the conversation decisively.

Then---

"---Y, yes!"

She made a large nod.

Leonora's two supple arms wrapped around Kamito's neck.

In an instant, Kamito sunk into the water completely.

He relaxed his entire body and closed his eyes. A variation of the «Water Lily» movement --- «Aqua Elusion». Syncing his mind and body with the flow of the water, he could completely conceal his presence.

"---Milla, don't think badly of this."

".....!?"

Appearing suddenly from behind Milla, he tickled her under the arms without mercy.

".....Ah, kya, nn!"

The usually cool Milla let out a lovely voice and twisted her body.

"Now!"

"Yes!"

"Faaa, Mi, Milla!?"

In the instant Milla's rider, Mireille, lost her balance---

Leonora quickly reached out and snatched her «Magic Stone».

Splaaaaash!

A flashy wall of water rose when Mireille fell down.

"H, how terrible!" "Even to a child that young!" "That brutish.....!"

Harsh criticisms of Kamito came from the surrounding girls and mixed together but---

"Leonora, can you still do it?"

"Yes, m, my breasts hurt but I'll somehow endure it!"

"Alright, that's the spirit---"

As Kamito nodded, he heard the thunderous roar of winds.

"C, curse you, Kamito, you insolent person!"

From afar, Ellis and Fianna were closing in at an alarming rate.

(Fast.....!)

Fianna's reflexes were average for a spirit contractor, but her divine power control was exceptional. Her movements underwater were comparable to or surpassed Kamito's.

Moreover, they were wrapped in a barrier of wind and accelerating.

(.....This is quite a handicap.)

To begin with, Kamito wasn't proficient in spirit magic and Leonora's dragon attribute spirit magic specialized in destruction and physical strengthening. They had pretty much no basic spells and nothing for general-use like wind spirit magic. No, what was worse than that---

"E, Ellis, haven't you shoved too much into it!?"

Stuffed with a large amount of «Magic Stones» that she had snatched, Ellis' swimsuit looked like it was about to fall apart at any moment.

His gaze had been unwittingly drawn to her bosom swaying in the wind.

"Kamito, where are you looking!"

"I, I couldn't help it!"

Having realized where he was looking, Ellis hurriedly covered her breasts with both her hands.

"Jeez, Kamito-kun, look at me as well!"

Fianna puffed her cheeks and let her breasts float on the water out of rivalry.

"A, a princess shouldn't do those kinds of embarrassing things!"

".....I, it's not embarrassing if Kamito-kun wants to see."

The princess blushed as she blew bubbles on the water's surface.

(.....Aren't you plenty embarrassed.)

"Kamito, just where are you looking?"

"Guoo....."

A displeased voice. Leonora's thighs strangled him.

"I, I get it, so don't strangle me!"

Using that opening, Ellis and Fianna lunged at them by riding the wind.

"Leonora-dono, we can't allow you to perform a blade dance of the night!"

"I won't perform such a thing!"

Ellis and Leonora were grappling overhead.

"Kamito-kun, no matter how much of a demon king of the night you are, even I won't stay quiet if your lovers increase any further than this!"

"I'm telling you, it's not like that!"

On the other hand, Fianna was pressing her breasts up against Kamito.

With the soft sensation traveling past her skimpy swimsuit, as expected, even Kamito couldn't hide his excitement.

"---O wind!"

Sharp winds flew from Ellis' finger and greatly shook Leonora's breasts.

".....I won't lose---!"

Leonora retaliated with her hand as she shielded her chest.

"Since Kamito is fighting for my sake!"

Squish.

".....Ahh, nn.....!"

Ellis let out a captivating voice. Her long ponytail shuddered.

".....Ah, ya, hau.....!"

".....Mm, kyann, ahnnn!"

"H, hey.....!"

Kamito's focus was broken by the erotic cries coming from above and---

Click.

He suddenly heard that sound.

".....Eh?"

Kamito looked up without thinking.

What first entered his sight was---

A large number of «Magic Stones» leaking from both of their breasts.

Fluttering, scant cloth.

And Kamito saw them.

.....Ended up seeing them.

Hanging down, the breasts of the two beautiful girls.

""Ky---""

An instant.

""Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!""

Both of them spontaneously discharged their divine power and a giant water pillar rose from the lake.



".....nora. Leonora!"

"U, mm.....cough, cough....."

With a hazy consciousness, Leonora opened her eyes.

Before her was Kamito who had a serious expression.

".....Ka.....to.....?"

She muttered while getting up and---

".....Leonora, I'm glad."

Kamito sighed in relief.

".....How did the «Water Spirit Festival» go?"

"Ahh, everyone was blown away and it was cancelled."

Kamito gave a small shrug.

"Ah, but look, I got him."

".....?"

To the puzzled Leonora---

Kamito showed her a large dragon plushie.

"---This is!?"

"Everyone at the lake was blown away and the «Magic Stones» were also scattered but just one.....I found one that was stuck."

Kamito muttered as he blushed.

So they had won a prize because everybody else competing had been obliterated.

"Well, if that's true, then everyone was disqualified but --- it seems the lake spirits were satisfied with the ritual. Nobody was injured and there's also nobody blaming us."

"Is that so....."

Leonora nodded and---

Something caught her attention.

".....Umm, Kamito."

"Yes?"

"Was stuck?"

".....!"

Kamito averted his gaze and didn't answer.

".....Kamito?"

She asked again with a little bit of force.

"No, that's....."

Kamito shook his head as if resigned.

"I, in your cleavage....."

".....Y, you touched my breasts!?"

"No, well, sorry. Something was shining on your chest, so I just---"

Kamito confessed honestly. In an instant, Leonora's face grew hot.

".....Th, this pervert"

Hit, hit, hit.

Leonora pounded on Kamito's chest while continuing to blush. But in truth, when she had been hugging Kamito, she had not felt angry or shy.

She continued to hit Kamito while bewildered by this self-realization.

(.....Wh, what does it mean?)

She didn't know that feeling. She just had knowledge of it.

(Could it be, this feeling is.....no, there's no way, that kind of.....)

But if she thought about it --- it explained everything.

How her sword skills had dulled ever since she had fought Kamito. And then how while she had been with Kamito, her emotions were in disorder and her heart beat furiously.

.....She may have already realized deep within her heart.

She just didn't want to admit it.

That's right, since the day she had crossed blades with him---

(I, for Kazehaya Kamito---

Once she realized that, she wouldn't be able to look at him directly anymore.

Leonora lowered her fist and turned her face to the side while still blushing.

".....Leonora?"

Kamito tilted his head, puzzled.

"I, it would be best to admit this honestly, right."

"Yes?"

Leonora seemed to have decided something as she nodded to herself.

She thought that the disorder in her feelings would become a disorder in her sword.

But now that she had realized the cause, that had become an uplifting feeling instead.

Even more so than with the «Dragon Blood», it was uncontrollable and unstable.

---That was definitely something that was meant to become a power stronger than anything.

"Kamito!" "Kamito-kun!"

The voices of his teammates came from afar.

It seemed that they were running over to them.

"---Kamito, it's fine now. Thank you for today."

And Leonora stood up, then gazed directly at Kamito.

---She wouldn't avert her eyes this time.

"Umm, saying it's fine means---"

"I can blade dance at my best, is what it means."

".....!"

Kamito was confused for a little, but---

".....I see. I don't really get it, but that's great."

He shrugged as if relieved.

"Then I can battle you at full power as well."

The two exchanged nods and each stretched out a hand.

"The next time we exchange words will be when we blade dance."

"Yeah."

They shared a firm handshake and spun on their heels and---

Both of them walked away just like that without turning back.

Chapter Four

Interlude

Team Inferno

Continuing however deeply into the cavern---

"The top brass of the Alphas Theocracy have agreed to provide a new military spirit. But any further cooperation is impossible---"

Facing the wordless back of her master, Lily Flame continued to give her report.

"---Ahaa, a new toy is finally coming. I can finally play with onii-sama."

The one who opened her mouth was not Lily's master, but the cute girl walking beside her.

Muir Alenstarl --- the second-place «Monster» of the Instructional School.

"I'll break anyone and everyone that gets near onii-sama ♪"

While glaring sidelong at Muir who was smiling innocently, Lily sighed.

The stronghold assault spirit «Colossus», the wide-area annihilation spirit «Garuda» --- of the three that the Theocracy had lent to them, Muir had already used up two. Of course, their results in the real battle had been adequate, but the protests of the Theocracy's top brass were stronger than expected.

"I don't care how many military spirits from a former era we break. Either way, the world will change with this time's «Blade Dance»."

"---Yes."

Lily placed a hand to her chest and respectfully agreed.

With regards to the «Plan» to change the world, Lily had not been told anything by her master.

If she had not seen the face beneath the mask, she would not even know who she was.

---She was simply a tool that acted as another's hands and feet.

(---But that's fine. This lady has given me all I have.)

That day when flames wrapped the «Instructional School»'s facility, she had extended a hand to her.

---Will you leave here and come with me?

(Since the moment I took her hand, I---)

"---And how is the «Witch» doing?"

What interrupted her recollection of that time was her master's question.

The Alphas Theocracy princess that had failed to capture the «Darkness Spirit Princess» had not been seen.

It was likely that the empire's secret organization, «Snake», was planning to move before them but---

"I didn't mean «Snake». I was asking about the real «Witch»."

"Real witch --- you mean Lady Greyworth?"

Lily tilted her head slightly.

She had received information of her arrival yesterday. She didn't think it was particularly important so she hadn't reported it but---

"Even if she is a former «Numbers», I don't think a retired spirit knight could do much---"

".....If so, that would be good."

The ruby eyes underneath the crimson mask glowed faintly.

Chapter Five

The Night before the Finale

Evening. Dusk hung over «Ragna Ys» which was floating in Astral Zero's skies.

Having spent a turbulent day with Leonora, Kamito returned with Ellis and Fianna, who happened to be at the pool, to the castle they were staying at.

After this, the oracle concerning the finals would be delivered by the five spirit princesses at the «Divine Ritual Institute»'s «Grand Shrine». They would convene once with the entire team to discuss their plans for what was to come.

He showered then went to Claire's room and knocked.

"Claire, it's about time."

"Yes, the preparations are already complete. You may enter."

He opened the door and found Claire and the others sitting atop the bed playing Old Maid.

"I win. That makes 17 wins with 2 losses."

Claire tossed the cards.

"O-One more time!"

"It will be the same no matter how many times we do it. You're an open book."

".....~! H-How frustrating!"

Rinslet cried out with teary eyes.

It seemed the two of them had performed a simple purification in the shower as their hair was wet.

.....The hair clinging to their necks was somehow sexy.

"Have you been playing cards the whole time?"

"Yes, it heated up without me noticing!"

"Even though I also thought about inviting you; where have you been all this time?"

"Ah, no, I just went to town for lunch....."

.....There was no way he could say he had been out on a date with the ace of an enemy team.

"Jeez, if it's lunch, I would have made it for you."

"E-Even I can at least make lunch.....!"

".....No, eating cinders for dinner is too heavy on my stomach."

Kamito muttered as he broke out into a cold sweat.

"Kamito, welcome back."

Est who had been playing with Scarlet trotted over.

"Yeah. Sorry for leaving you behind this morning. Here, cake from a night stall."

Kamito presented the cake box and the sword spirit's eyes lit up.

Just then, Ellis opened the door and entered.

"Everyone, what are you doing? We'll be late if we don't hurry."

".....There's still an hour left."

Claire sighed in disbelief.



The spectating nobles had already gathered at the Grand Shrine.

A magnificent bonfire blazed in front of the massive stone gates and the solemn aria of the «Divine Ritual Institute»'s princess maidens could be heard.

Undoubtedly, the five spirit maidens were receiving the oracle at the deepest reaches of the Grand Shrine.

".....There are a lot of people as usual."

"Claire, if you're scared, do you wanna hold hands?"

"Y-Yeah.....wait, I'm n-not scared!"

Kamito teased her and Claire averted her face from him.

They walked down the hall extending from the stone gate and,

"Ahh, Onee-sama and everyone!"

Rinslet's little sister waved her hand after noticing them.

"Mireille!"

Rinslet hugged her little sister who came running over.

"Since you're not here with father, you'll get lost in these crowds."

"Milla's here so I'm fine."

Milla the maid nodded from behind Mireille.

"That's true but.....by the way, you're not here with Carol?"

".....Yeah, we were with her partway, but it seems that we lost her."

"My apologies. I had to accompany Lady Mireille so....."

Milla hung her head as if she had no excuse.

"No, Carol always gets lost."

Rinslet sighed.

".....I've had this question for a while, but how did Carol pass the Laurenfrost employment exam?"

"The foremost criterion of a Laurenfrost maid is that she is cute."

Rinslet said that as if it was extremely obvious.

".....Well, true, Carol and Milla do fulfill that condition."

".....!"

Milla's ears twitched in response to Kamito's words.

"Oh, your ears are red, Milla; what's wrong?"

".....It's nothing. I'm fine."

Milla replied expressionlessly to Mireille's teasing smile.

"Haa, Kamito is truly a natural demon king....."

Fianna sighed in resignation.

And.

"Excuse me, Kazehaya Kamito-dono."

"---?"

All of a sudden, his shoulder was hit from behind.

Turning around, an elderly man with frighteningly good physique was glaring sharply at Kamito.

A fearless face like a falcon. Blue hair that was trimmed short.

.....He somehow had the impression that there was a great resemblance to someone he knew well.

"Umm, you are---"

Kamito knit his brows with suspicion and,

"Grandfather!"

Ellis let out a surprised voice beside him.

"Grandfather.....wait, no way!"

Kamito realized.

Then this old man was---

(The empire's chief advisor on military matters, Duke Fahrengart---)

A hero of the Ranbal War that had contributed greatly. Honestly speaking, rather than by word of mouth, just seeing him, he was an important noble.

Claire, Rinslet and even Fianna who was from the royalty nodded respectfully.

Kamito, who was staring in blank amazement, was lightly elbowed by Claire and hurriedly nodded respectfully.

"You need not be so rigid. Lift your heads."

Duke Fahrengart nodded in a composed manner and smacked Kamito's shoulder.

"I have heard much about you from Ellis. Your feats in the «Blade Dance» are truly admirable."

".....Umm, it's an honor."

Kamito replied like that while still bewildered. He had imagined someone more fastidious as Ellis' grandfather, but he seemed unexpectedly candid.

"We troubled you with the matter of Velsaria. I am told that you were the one who severed those foolish misguided notions. She said she would like to meet you once again after she has finished atoning for her crime."

"Ah, Ane-ue did, to Kamito.....?"

Ellis interjected, looking like she was doubtful.

"What, are you interested?"

Duke Fahrengart teasingly patted his granddaughter's head.

"N-No, that's....."

Ellis' face went bright red and she twined her fingers.

Seeing that, Duke Fahrengart nodded like he had reaffirmed something and,

"Kamito-dono."

"Eh?"

He leaned in near Kamito's ear and whispered.

"I leave Ellis to you. She has her overly serious and stubborn points but she's an earnest girl. I trust you have no problems with her heritage?"

"Umm, what do you....."

He tried to ask but his shoulders were grabbed.

"However---"

Duke Fahrengart's voice lowered.

"Affairs are not allowed, they are not. You had best remember this. If you make my granddaughter cry, the full military might of Fahrengart house which stands at the head of the warrior class will become your enemy."

Grind, grind, grind.....the old man's fingertips dug into his shoulder.

(.....This old man has crazy grip!)

Kamito shuddered.....if he were to make Ellis cry, he may really be killed.

"With that, I shall excuse myself here. I will be hoping for your victory."

Duke Fahrengart smiled gently and left quietly.

"....."

"Ka-Kamito, well, what did my grandfather say to you?"

"Ah, no, he entrusted me with you. O-Of course he meant as a teammate."

Kamito scratched his head while averting his eyes and,

"I-I see....."

Ellis held a hand to her chest as if relieved.

"---It seems the other teams have also come."

Everyone turned to the stone gates at Claire's words.

The ones who entered were the «Knights of the Dragon Emperor» spearheaded by Leonora Lancaster.

"Leonora---"

Kamito was about to call out but---

He changed his mind when their eyes met.

---The next time we exchange words will be when we blade dance.

He remembered the words she said when they parted.

Exchanging words were unnecessary. What came later would only be serious sword strikes.

Leonora smiled fearlessly and immediately turned her eyes elsewhere and left.

".....I feel amazing divine power. It looks like they've also leveled up."

"Yeah. Leonora now is probably stronger than she was when the «Dragon Blood» was raging. Her eyes had no trace of hesitation."

".....Mu, Kamito observes Leonora-dono quite a bit."

"Truly, you at least tamed her with that date."

"I said that wasn't a date!"

Kamito shook his head in a fluster in response to the unsatisfied glares of Ellis and Fianna.

The next to appear were the «Sacred Spirit Knights» who had advanced through the «Tempest» in second place.

They were wearing a uniform that was like the opposite of the «Rupture Division»'s. Since the Principality of Rossvale had gained its independence from Lugia, it was expected.

Standing at the head was the Paladin --- Luminaris Saint Leisched.

With her brilliant blonde hair was interwoven, a nineteen year old female knight. She was a powerful person that had fought Kamito in the «Blade Dance» for the championship three years prior.

(.....She's a powerful holy spirit user. I had a hard battle against her.)

Kamito remembered that time.

A holy attribute spirit had a strong resistance to darkness spirits. Consequently, his darkness Elemental Waffe, «Vorpall Sword», was completely repelled.

It seemed like she had sought revenge against Ren Ashbell for three years, but decisively suppressed the surrounding weaker teams in the «Tempest».

(.....It's probably something like having a conclusion at the finals.)

To begin with, she thought the commander of «Team Inferno» was the real Ren Ashbell but---

"It's already time. Does «Team Inferno» not plan to appear?"

"Well, as long as they leave a familiar, they can hear the oracle."

Kamito answered Claire's mutter.

And. The hall suddenly became noisy and then fell into silence.

Princess maidens wrapped in white ritual clothes came from the altar's inner door.

The five spirit maidens that directly served the «Five Great Spirit Kings». Their faces were shrouded by a veil so the audience couldn't see them.

"Reicha's the furthest on the left."

Fianna whispered so that just Kamito could hear.

Even the girl of which he had an unshakeable impression that she was a normal girl when they'd met at the «Grand Shrine» was now wrapped in a solemn atmosphere.

The spirit princess at the center continued out in front of the shrine.

Everyone came to a pause and paid attention to the words that came from those lips.

Then---

"---I will now relay the spirit kings' oracle."

The spirit princess' dignified voice was carried throughout the hall by the power of wind spirits.

"---The stage for the finals is the old abandoned capital, «Megidoa»."



Parting from Mireille's group, they exited the «Grand Shrine».

The refreshing night breeze bore the clamor of the large audience.

"---The abandoned capital «Megidoa», huh."

Kamito muttered as he walked along the gently sloping hill.

".....It was unexpected. To think that a place I've never heard of would come up. At least, it shouldn't have been a stage for the «Blade Dance» until now."

Fianna said with a shrug. Since she who had come from the «Divine Ritual Institute» had no knowledge of it, there was hardly a place most people would know.

Choosing a sacred ground within Astral Zero was the usual for the «Blade Dance».

Even so, having an abandoned city that wasn't anything like a sacred ground chosen was---

(.....As I thought, something's strange about this time's «Blade Dance».)

It was as if errors had appeared in a perfect system.

(.....If that's so, what's the cause?)

The «Blade Dance» three years ago had proceeded normally.

What broke that was---

(.....!)

A flashback.

Within the encroaching black «Wish», the boy reached out a hand for the darkness spirit girl.

"Ah, ku.....!"

Assaulted by a sudden dizziness, Kamito held his head.

"Kamito, what's wrong?"

Claire asked in a worried tone.

".....Ahh, I'm fine. I just felt a little dizzy."

Kamito waved his hand to tell her not to worry.

.....Those memories seemed to be locked away and could not be recalled.

"---There's also the field, but we also have to consider the blade dance form."

"That's right."

Claire nodded in response to Ellis' mutterings.

The rule decided upon by the spirit kings' oracle was «Cross Fire».

The duration was three days. It was basically the same as the «Tempest», survival within the field, but the difference was that each team member would be teleported to a different location.

"To put it bluntly, there is a need to search for one's comrades. If a team gathers quickly, they gain the opportunity to crush every one of the enemy team's Elementalist."

It seemed Claire had already begun thinking about tactics suited to the rules.

Bang!

At that time, a rainbow-colored flower bloomed in the night sky.

---It was a firework. Kamito stopped in his tracks and was entranced by the blooming fireworks.

The seven-colored lights danced into various forms and entertained the onlookers.

The lights were really spirits being released.

"It's beautiful....."

Claire murmured as she gazed at the fireworks in a trance.

"They're launching spirit crystals for that, right? It's ridiculously high up."

"Jeez, your thinking is that of a plebeian."

Claire shrugged her shoulders, sounding a little surprised.

"When you speak of fireworks---"

And Ellis opened her mouth as if she had just remembered something.

"When we return to the academy, we have to prepare for the «Grand Spirit Festival»."

"Grand Spirit Festival?"

"It's an academy festival that is held at Areishia Spirit Academy every year. The Syphid Knights also become so busy we'd even accept the help of a cat, so you had best prepare yourself as well."

"So there's an academy festival. It sounds fun."

"Yeah. But the side that keeps public morals can't say that. The spirits in last year's Raven Class production went wild and became a big problem."

"T-That brings back memories....."

"T-There might have been something like that!"

.....In order to avoid the issue, the problem children combo from the Raven Class turned towards the future.

"I'm part of the group that was just admitted, so I have Freya-sensei's supplementary lessons after we return."

Fianna sighed a little.

.....They were only about ten days ago, but those days at the academy were nostalgic.

Two months ago, «Team Scarlet» consisted of only Claire and Kamito.

But they had gathered five teammates, won through the ranking battles and made it this far.

---There were three days left in the «Blade Dance».

He wondered if he could regain those which were important to him with his own hands.

(Or possibly lose everything.....)

An even more grand firework bloomed in the night sky.

"I wonder if we can win and return to the academy safe and sound."

Maybe from being sentimental, Ellis voiced her anxiety.

"We've come this far. We only need to blade dance with all our strength."

"Yeah, that's right."

"If we combine our strength, we can even defeat that fake Ren Ashbell--
_"

At that moment, Fianna's face seemed to cloud over.

"Fianna, what's wrong?"

".....I-It's nothing."

Kamito inquired and Fianna averted her eyes as she shook her head.

He was a little interested in her attitude but---

(.....That's right. I must win against that other «Strongest Blade Dancer».)

---In order to discover the truth behind three years ago and save Restia.

Underneath the leather glove on his left hand, the darkness spirit's seal throbbed with a dull pain.

And.

"---That's the spirit. Claire Rouge."

Until she called out, nobody had noticed her presence.

Turning around, a beautiful woman with ash blonde hair was there.

".....Greyworth?"

Drawing the spirit crystal's light closer and coming over, it was the «Dusk Witch».

"Academy director, what are you doing here!?"

Claire said in a surprised voice.

"---Sorry, but I'll be borrowing the boy for now."

"Kamito?"

"For what? Tomorrow is the finals."

Kamito said as if snarling and,

"The night is still long. Improving relations doesn't suffice as a reason?"

"Wha!?"

All the ojou-samas were stirred up at Greyworth's words.

"K-Kamito, don't tell me, even up to the academy directory....."

Gogogogogogogo.....!

"Haa, the scope of Kamito-kun's defense surprises me sometimes."

"Kamito-san really doesn't have any boundaries!"

"C-Curse you, such shameless....."

"W-Wait, there's really nothing like that!"

Kamito yelled in a panic.

Seeing the ojou-samas' reactions, Greyworth smiled like she was enjoying herself.

"It was a joke. I'm not stealing the boy, so rest easy."

""""W-We weren't worried!""""

The ojou-samas with red faces gave a collective cry.

"If it's a joke, I'm heading back."

Kamito tried to turn to leave and,

"Well, don't be in such a rush. I have something I'd like to impart to you."

"What?"

"I can't give it to you here. It's necessary for your victory."

Greyworth's expression had become serious at some point.

"....."

Kamito thought for a little---

".....Okay. Let's finish this quickly."

"Whether it will be short or not depends on you."

Greyworth shrugged.

Kamito turned to his teammates and,

"Sorry. Please return to the castle ahead of me."

".....Y-Yes, we will."

Claire nodded a little sadly.

"Ahh, that's right. Bring along that sword spirit."

"Est?"

"Since the night is dangerous. A means to defend oneself is necessary."

"You need protection? What kind of joke is this.....is that okay, Est?"

"Yes. I am Kamito's sword. For as long as you wish."

Est nodded and changed form into her Elemental Waffe, «Terminus Est».



Greyworth descended from the hill and walked into the deep forest.

The night spirits floated between trees, giving off mysterious light.

"We'll be there soon. Improving relations has to be done somewhere others can't see."

"Wha.....!"

"Don't blush every time. You're really cute."

"Kuu....."

The «Dusk Witch» smiled like she was having fun.

The sound of fireworks still echoed from far away.

".....It's been a long time. Walking through the forest with you like this."

"You tricked me by saying we were going mushroom hunting in the forest and we ended up hunting a demon god class spirit."

Kamito leered at Greyworth who was walking in front of him.

"Ahh, that did happen."

"I really thought I'd die that time."

"But that live combat was the best kind of training, right?"

Greyworth shrugged.

"That was when you grasped the «Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance»."

"If I hadn't, I would have died."

"Sheesh, since when did you become so rebellious. You were more honest and cute three years ago --- and we're here."

Greyworth finally came to a halt.

A large space made by clearing the forest. It was likely for the training of the «Divine Ritual Institute»'s princess maidens.

"So what was it you wanted to give me?"

Greyworth's grey eyes seemed to be piercing Kamito as they gazed at him.

"---Kamito, I will entrust you with the final Absolute Blade Art."

".....Wh.....at.....?"

Kamito's eyes widened at the unexpected response.

The Absolute Blade Arts of the «Dusk Witch» who was called the strongest Elementalist on the continent.

That was something that, together with «Vorpall Sword», had created «Ren Ashbell».

".....What do you mean? You should have already entrusted me with the secrets three years ago."

Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance --- an anti-spirit destruction sword technique.

The technique that defeated the monster of darkness, Nepenthes Lore.

Anything beyond that technique shouldn't exist---

"Certainly, that technique is the top sword technique. If successful, it will even massacre a demon god class spirit."

Greyworth shook her head.

"But there is a final secret that I didn't teach you."

"Final secret....."

Kamito gulped. The witch wasn't teasing him.

"Why---"

"There is a reason I didn't teach you it three years ago. If someone inexperienced with the Absolute Blade Arts uses it, his or her body will be destroyed."

"....."

Certainly, the Absolute Blade Arts which surpassed the limits of flesh would destroy the user's body.

In actuality, even now, Kamito had not mastered them to a sufficient degree.

"But that technique---"

"That's right. Honestly speaking, you shouldn't use that kind of technique in live combat."

Greyworth assented easily.

"But the you of now cannot win against the «Strongest Blade Dancer». That is reality."

.....He couldn't retort.

That was something that Kamito himself understood best.

".....If I perform that secret successfully, I can beat her?"

"---Possibly. You are weaker than you were then but your matured body is better. Your body now may be able to withstand the secret's recoil."

Greyworth's mouth curled and she placed a hand to the ground.

A beam of light like blood came out and an ominous magic square was drawn.

"---Come forth from the gates of Hell, earl that ascends to greatness, demon spirit «Void»!"

".....!"

From the center of the magic square glowing with red light came a formless lump of darkness.

Kamito's skin stood on end from the dreadful air of intimidation.

Formerly under Demon King Solomon, one of the pillars of his seventy-two spirits.

Greyworth extended her hand out and the lump of darkness became a sword at once, appearing in the witch's hand.

Elemental Waffe --- «Storm Bringer».

With an appearance greatly resembling Restia's «Vorpall Sword», it was a jet black sword.

"....."

Kamito unsheathed the «Demon Slayer» wordlessly.

The shining silvery white brilliance lit up the dark forest.

"It's been three years since our last practice. Are you prepared, boy?"

"The you of three years ago wouldn't have asked that to an opponent that has drawn their sword."

He had nothing to worry about.

For the current Kamito, the power to defeat the other Ren Ashbell was required.

In an instant, Greyworth's silhouette disappeared.

Deflecting the blade flash, a harsh metallic sound resounded in the night forest.

".....!"

"Ohh, you withstood the first strike. It seems you've recovered your sense from long ago."

The elemental waffen created sparks as they ground against each other.

(As usual, such monstrous strength.....!)

He instinctively shuddered.

If it had been Kamito before the «Blade Dance», he wouldn't have been able to see through it.

---Yes, this was the blade of the one previously called the strongest on the continent.

The divine power gushing forth from Storm Bringer was overwhelming Terminus Est.

".....Est is losing!?"

"That spirit isn't inferior to mine. There is an inconsistency in your output of divine power. It's been your weak point since before."

Greyworth declared that coldly and increased her sword pressure.

"Kuu --- why, you.....!"

Kamito filled Est with all the divine power in his body.

The silvery white sword gave off an oppressive shine and began pushing back against Storm Bringer in an instant.

"Yes, your instantaneous power exceeds me. However---"

Greyworth disappeared from his sight.

And faster than the thirst for blood---

"Absolute Blade Arts, First Form --- «Purple Lightning»!"

A stab like lightning gouged Kamito's abdomen.

"Kahaa!"

A severe impact hit him and Kamito's body hit the ground. The bodily damage from the «Elemental Waffe» was converted to mental damage, causing a severe concussion.

"---Stand. I held back."

"....."

Kamito groaned and shakily got to his feet.

It was true she held back.

Since he had taken an Absolute Blade Art but could still stand.

".....It's been a while since I've taken that sword technique."

While wiping the blood from his lip, Kamito smiled.

"Did that wake you up, boy?"

"Yeah. Thanks."

Once again, he readied the shining «Terminus Est» with both his hands.

He stared directly at Greyworth who stood before him.

He could feel something awakening within himself.

The memories engraved in his body were coming back vividly.

"The ojou-samas are waiting---"

Kamito smiled fearlessly.

"I'll have you pass over the strongest Absolute Blade Art quickly."

"---That's it, those are the eyes. Only those eyes haven't changed from three years ago."

Greyworth's grey eyes stared at Kamito.

The point of the demon sword slowly came to aim at the middle of Kamito's forehead.

It was an oppression that sent goosebumps along his skin.

"Listen well, I won't show you the secret more than once. Grasp its nature in that one strike."

"Just once?"

"What it means is it will be impossible if you cannot grasp it after just once. Simply inheriting the title as the strongest Elementalist does not mean you have the qualities to learn the Absolute Blade's secret."

Greyworth informed him in a piercingly cold voice.

Kamito's whole body broke out in a cold sweat.

A momentary silence. Then---

".....Okay. That's enough."

Kamito gave a short nod.

A superficial sword would not pass for Greyworth.

In order to fill his elemental waffe with his thoughts, he closed his eyes and honed his senses.

What came to his mind was---

Claire, Fianna, Ellis, Rinslet --- the faces of his comrades.

And the «Demon Slayer» in his hands, Terminus Est.

(.....There's no way I can lose!)

The sword in his hand was one which carried the «Wishes» of all of them.

"---Let's do this, Greyworth."

"Ahh, there's no use holding back. Come at me with the strongest technique you have."

"Has there ever been a time I've held back against you?"



He filled «Terminus Est» with all his divine power.

The silvery white sword shone dazzlingly, wiping away the forest's darkness.

Kamito charged as if to split the wind.

(---The strongest sword technique I can use now.)

He kicked the ground and accelerated. He changed to a reverse grip on the holy sword in his hands.

Then---

"Absolute Blade Arts, Destructive Form --- Bursting Blossom Spiral Blade Dance, 18 Consecutive Strikes!"

With a glint, countless scattered blades flashed.

The slashes' flashes were a destructive blade dance that boasted absolute killing power.

---Properly speaking, it was a technique for the purpose of defeating a mighty demon god class spirit.

The storm of consecutive attacks resembling the blooming of a flower.

But the strongest witch on the continent --- stopped all of that with her blade.

Putting aside when she was in her golden age, Greyworth right now shouldn't be able to match up to Kamito physically. Then why was she able to take on Kamito's sword---

He came to know the answer soon.

(.....!?)

Greyworth's ash blonde hair was giving off a faint luminescence.

It was the glow of the divine power she was expelling. And it was strong enough to be seen with the naked eye.

(While we were exchanging blows, she absorbed my divine power!?)

He wondered if that was the ability of «Void»'s elemental waffe---

(No, that's wrong --- it's not that!)

Greyworth was matching her divine power to Kamito's divine power.

If one were to completely match their opponent's movements and breathing, he or she could make the opponent's divine power which would normally be repelled his or her own --- that was already something not of battle blade dancing but of the «Divine Ritual Institute»'s princess maidens' specialty.

(This is the Absolute Blade's secret---)

The countless repelled sparks --- the concealed surges of the eighteen consecutive strikes that held absolute killing power.

The instant the final sword blow landed.

Kamito understood. The truth of the Absolute Blade's secret.

(.....It's coming!)

Kamito had put all his divine power into the eighteen consecutive strikes.

---That enormous power was now infused into Greyworth's sword.

Evasion was impossible. He instinctively understood that.

Greyworth's lips moved slightly---

Then---

"Absolute Blade Arts, Final Form --- «Last Strike»!"

The glinting tip of the sword pierced Kamito's chest.

Epilogue

The Ultimate Sword Technique, Final Form, “Last Strike.”

“You neutralize your opponent’s attack power and then hit him hard with a counter... huh. For an ultimate sword technique, that’s really unexpectedly simple.”

Kamito lay spread-eagle with his eyes open and muttered.

A number of repaired spirit crystals were scattered about next to him. It seemed that Greyworth had been the one who had revived him from unconsciousness.

Kamito saw a head of neck-length, ashen blonde hair.

Greyworth’s face was right in front of his, looking down at him.

Beads of sweat condensed on Greyworth’s brow.

“The Ultimate Sword Technique... did you see it all?”

“Yeah. I think I got it, more or less.”

The feeling of having that ultimate attack tear into his body was carved into his memory.

(... But, can I actually use it?)

It might be obvious, but just seeing that ultimate attack wasn’t enough to master it. If you countered, you could defeat a stronger opponent, but it was a double-edged sword, as a single mistake could mean the end of everything.

So it was definitely not a skill he could just use carelessly.

“Ah, I see.”

Greyworth chuckled, seemingly satisfied-

-and then her body suddenly shook and buckled.

And her face fell right into Kamito's chest as he lay there on his back.

"..... H-Hey, what the hell are you doing?!"

She didn't look right.

Kamito shook her by the shoulders, but,

"Kamito, I'm leaving the rest to you-"

Greyworth clutched at her chest in pain and gasped for breath, seeming out of her mind.

And the light slowly disappeared from her grey eyes.

"Defeat Ren Ashbell..."

"Greyworth!"

Kamito's scream echoed into that silent night.



It was in a cave beneath the ground of Ragna Ys.

A girl with a crimson mask opened her ruby eyes slightly.

She could feel that a great Divine Power had been vanquished somewhere.

"I see. Dusk has passed, and the dark night beckons."

"Ren Ashbell-sama, is something the matter?"

The silver-haired girl Lily Flame stood prepared by her side and frowned.

"Right now, at this moment, an age has passed. That is all."

".....?"

The masked girl, Ren Ashbell, stood up and began to walk outside.

“I’m going. To prepare for war.”

“A-Alright!”

A somewhat flustered Lily hurried after her master.

The insane spirit of darkness, the “Snake” of the Church. I will not let anyone get in your way.

In order to topple the king of this world.

Afterword

Author

---Princess maidens that serve a dragon may not wear underwear.

To all who have taken this book into their hands, truly thank you very much!

We have reached the eighth volume of "Seirei Tsukai no Blade," "The Night Before the Finale".

Having won through the «Tempest admirably, «Team Scarlet» returns to the floating island. In preparation for the approaching finals, Kamito takes a short rest --- or so he thinks, but he ends up on a date with the strongest ace from the «Knights of the Dragon Emperor», Leonora Lancaster!?

Last time and the time before that, flashy battles were happening so this time I delved into the heroines' pasts and the date with a heroine from another team. Of course, I have various things prepared for the finals which start next volume, so all of you who like battles, please look forward to it!

Thanks and now for the announcements. At present, Hyouji Yuitsusei-sensei's comic version of "Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance" is serialized in Comic Alive's magazine. Please somehow support the invigorating battle scenes and insanely cute heroines that Hyouji-sensei draws.

Sakura Hanpen-sensei, thank you for your wonderful drawings as well. Leonora's armpits on the front cover look very good. Others that were drawn for the first time like Milla Bassett, Kamito from the past, Lolislet (← I wanted to try saying it), etc. were drawn very cutely.

To my editor Shouji-sama, I am always really relying on you. The rumored "Light Novel King ☆ Seiya" with a main character that seems to be modeled after Shouji-san is serialized in Comic Gene and is enjoying great popularity (advertisement).

Lastly, to all the readers. By receiving all your support, "Seirei Tsukai no Blade Dance" has reached its eighth volume. Sakura Hanpen-sensei, Hyouji Yuitsusei-sensei and Shouji-san, I will be going all out from here on, so I'm counting on you!

I read all the impressions from the cellphone survey carefully and I'm really happy to receive them. As usual, in the popularity rankings, Est and Restia are strong, and Kamito who appeared on the cover of the seventh volume also rose in popularity. From the team's ojou-samas, Ellis rose a little and after that, the rest feel average.

---With that, the ninth volume's finals will have more and more battles.

«Cross Fire» --- Amidst the blaze, what does Kamito see?

Shimizu Yuu, July 2012